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ABSTRACT

This series of issues of a newsletter called "The Dangling Modifier" begins with Volume 1, Number 1 (Fall 1994) and concludes with Volume 9, Number 2 (2003). The newsletter is subtitled "A National Newsletter by and for Peer Tutors in Writing" for the majority of the issues--the last issue changes the subtitle to "An International Newsletter by and for Peer Tutors in Writing." The newsletter was begun by the Penn State Writing Center staff with the idea that a national newsletter would allow tutors to: work on a large scale editing project, write for a national publication, and work and learn with tutors across the country. Volume 1, Number 1 consists of representative articles entitled: "Tutoring ESL Writers; "On-line Tutoring"; "Marketing Your Tutoring Experience"; "Tutoring Sensitive Issues"; and "Featured Writing Center." This series contains the following issues: Volume 1, Number 1 (Fall 1991); Volume 1, Number 2 (Spring 1005); Volume 2, Number 2 (Spring 1996); Volume 3, Number 1 (Fall 1996); Volume 4, Number 1 (Fall 1997); Volume 4, Number 2 (Spring 1998); Volume 6, Number 1 (Spring 1999); Volume 6, Number 2 (Summer 1999); Volume 7, Number 1 (Fall 2000); Volume 8, Number 1 (Fall 2001); Volume 8, Number 2 (2000); Volume 9, Number 1 (2002); and Volume 9, Number 2 (2003). (NKA)

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The Dangling Modifier: A National Newsletter by and for Peer Tutors in Writing, 1994-2003

Dangling Modifier v1-9 Fall 1994-Spr 2003

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The Dangling Modifier

Volume 1, Number 1 A National Newsletter by and for Peer Tutors in Writing Fall 1994

Welcome to the first edition of the national peer tutor newsletter--*The Dangling Modifier*! We hope you will come to our workshop session at 11:00 on Sunday to give your input and suggestions.

The idea for this newsletter began at last year's conference in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Tutors from the Penn State Writing Center staff returned from the conference excited and inspired. "I wish we could do that twice a year," they chimed. "Wouldn't it be terrific to talk with tutors from other places more often during the year?" The tutors who had not been able to attend were interested in the idea of "talking" with other tutors. And so the idea for a national newsletter was born.

We were not certain if other tutors would be interested in a national newsletter. Response to our summer survey, however, told us they were. We decided to create a model newsletter and present it at the '94 conference (and here it is!). We envision this newsletter as a publication *for* peer tutors and *by* peer tutors.

We, at Penn State, would like to be instrumental in starting a newsletter whose publication, like the Conference itself, will eventually be passed from one writing center to another. A nominal subscription fee will cover the modest costs so editing writing centers will not have to foot the bill in money, only in time. Having a national newsletter will allow writing tutors to work on a large scale editing project, to write for a national publication, and to work and learn with tutors across the country. If you cannot attend the Sunday session, please leave your name and address at the conference registration desk for subscription information. ⊙

Inside . . .

- o Tutoring ESL writers
- o On-line tutoring
- o Marketing your tutoring experience
- o Tutoring sensitive issues
- o Featured writing center

Submission Information

Submissions for the next issue of *The Dangling Modifier* should be submitted to the Penn State Writing Center before March 1, 1995. Submissions should be less than 500 words and shorter submissions and excerpts are encouraged. Editors reserve the right to edit all submissions for grammar and length. Please include your telephone number so we can contact you about any stylistic changes. Feel free to contact us by phone with any questions at (814) 865-1841 and direct inquiries to Paul L. Little.

Please send your submissions to:
Penn State Writing Center
219 Boucke Building
University Park, PA 16802
e-mail: ~~man124.psu.edu~~ MANI24@ psuvm.psu.edu
Fax: (814) 863-8704

The Write Joke

by Deidra Minemier
Pennsylvania State University

One afternoon, an industrious yet worried student came into the Writing Center for help with a paper. "I'm a freshman," she said, "and it feels like forever since I've written anything. Do you think we could check my paper to make sure that it flows and to check that I've used correct grammar?" Feeling quite confident, I said, "You've come to the right place. We can address any concerns you have with your paper."

"Great--I've been really worried about this."

She got her paper out of a folder, and placed it on the table in front of us.

"Ummm..." my voice cracked, "you're paper is in French..." ⊙

Get involved in the creation of your national newsletter. Come to . . .

> **"I can agree that the center should not be viewed as a dry cleaners, where anyone can just drop off papers or a dirty draft and come back an hour later expecting their fundamentals to be folded, their grammar to be put through the gentle cycle, their style starched, and their content to be crisp and clean."**
> **- University of Maine Writing Center Newsletter**

What's My Role?

When a Student is Offensive to You: Where (How?) to Draw the Line.

by Cathy Darrup
Bucknell University

Late one night, a male first-year student (I'll call him "Nick") came to a Writing Center satellite office where I was working. He had developed a draft of a paper on *Pride and Prejudice*. He seemed concerned that he did not articulate his ideas clearly enough, and was looking for "a new set of ears." As I listened to his introductory comments and as he began to read his paper out loud, I got the impression that he wasn't quite comfortable with certain concepts within his paper. The professor was "a radical feminist," Nick said, and he seemed to be very aware of that fact as he was writing his paper. It soon became apparent that he disagreed with the professor's attitudes, but felt as though he had to conform to them in order to achieve a successful grade. The consequent tension unmasked instead of disguised his ignorance of and resistance to the ideas that contribute to "feminism." As the session progressed, Nick demonstrated a similar ignorance and resistant attitude toward anti-racism and sexual tolerance.

Moreover, Nick automatically assumed (perhaps because I was white too, didn't wear a T-shirt saying "I am a feminist" and didn't "look gay," whatever that means) that I agreed with his attitudes. In a spirit that was perhaps characteristic of his ignorance, he would say "I hope you aren't a feminist/homosexual/sensitive to the minority cause, but . . ." and would follow with a sweeping generalization or "I hate it when" clause that was informed only by negative stereotypes. Nick's paper itself was not problematic for me; it was very "neutral" so as not to offend his professor. Consequently his negative (and, to me, offensive) attitudes were pushed to the periphery of his paper, but remained at an unavoidable center of discussion during our session.

My immediate reaction was that I couldn't let Nick's negative stereotypes pass as though they were unnoticed, as though I was unaffected by them. Our session provoked a whirlwind of emotions and pointed questions I had to address: How possible is it for a tutor to remove herself from a student's attitudes, and consequently his writing? How does a tutor deal with a student whose attitudes are personally and morally offensive to her? Does she, in fact, deal with the issue at all, or does she "let it pass" in the interest of maintaining a degree of "professionalism"? Or does she define one aspect of "professionalism" in terms of confronting that person's attitude so as to maintain a degree of her own self-respect? What if the student's attitudes are reflected in his paper? While it's true that the tutor is not responsible for what she perceives as "negative opinions" in a paper, does she have a responsibility to at least inform the student of the potentially offensive tone of his paper?

Nick's paper, as I said, was not offensive; what was problematic was the conversation his paper instigated. Within his first two paragraphs, for example, Nick wrote about the women's mother "marrying them off so that they would be safe." That, of course, is a true and neutral interpretation of the text; that was not the problem. The problem developed when, at this point, I decided to deal with Nick's underlying, truer opinions by presenting this women's issue in a non-threatening, joking manner. I mentioned, in what I thought was a joking manner, how "ancient" a notion it is to "marry women off." Nick immediately took a defensive stance and "joked" right back that I was "another one of those feminist-types." He proceeded to tell me about the atmosphere within the classroom when his professor identifies a similarly sensitive topic. "Most

(continued on next page)

. . . our workshop session on Sunday, 11/13 at 11:00 am for details.

(continued from previous page)

of the guys laugh about it," he said, "but we all felt very uncomfortable when we went to buy our books in that bookstore downtown that's run by femi-nazis. There's even a sign outside that says 'for women only.'" (I happen to frequent "that bookstore downtown" and their sign, coincidentally, reads "For women, children, and friends.")

Nick then expanded the conversation to include various social issues that relate to oppressed groups, such as racism and homophobia. As a white male, he said, he is no longer the majority because the conglomeration of minority groups outnumber his group. He doesn't understand, either, why "all these groups," homosexuals in particular, want special rights, more rights than he has. We talked for at least a half an hour about these ideas. It had become clear that we did not agree on most of the points when Nick stopped that part of the session and said, "well, I guess you don't want to finish reading my paper." I explained that just because he and I disagree doesn't mean I can't do my job. So we continued and finished working through the paper. At that point Nick "joked" that he was going to tell his friends to never come to the Writing Center because they'll have to constantly be "on their toes." Whether he was serious or not was irrelevant to the fact that he was leaving our session with a negative impression of the Writing Center. Was I wrong to point out the problems with presupposing another person's opinions? Was it my place to do that? Should I steel myself against the likelihood of a similar situation happening again? Should I feign disinterest next time? What's my role?

How possible is it for a tutor to remove herself from a student's attitudes, and consequently his writing? How does a tutor deal with a student whose attitudes are personally and morally offensive to her?

The whole evening would have been the worst nightmare experience if Nick hadn't stopped on his way out and said "I don't want to make any enemies, let's talk about this some more." So we talked, for another hour, about our disagreements and, more importantly, about why we disagree. Again, however, I was addressing sensitive questions: was it my responsibility to try to make amends? Was I trying to protect the Writing Center's image or my own?

I think that Nick and I reached an understanding by stepping into the other's perspective and listening to that person's concerns. I think I left the Writing Center that night more sensitive to Nick's position: he presented it as "threatened" and I can now at least empathize with him at a more understanding level. I can't speak for Nick's feelings, but he took the time to listen to my position and is at least more informed about it now. If he does feel that he needs to be more "on his toes" in everyday conversation, maybe that isn't such a bad thing. ⊖

Featured Writing Center

Pennsylvania State University

by Kary Latham

HIGHLIGHT:

Among the most powerful components of our weekly staff meetings are "staff developments." These pockets of time, usually fifteen to twenty minutes in length, give our peer tutors better techniques to use when tutoring, greater facility in their own writing, and the chance to become more familiar with their fellow tutors' opinions.

Topics range from detailed explanations of assignments given in composition courses to issues that arise in tutoring sessions each week. We try our best to make the staff developments interactive and fun. For instance, one peer tutor divided our staff into groups of two, gave each group knitting needles and a set of knitting instructions, and had one member of the group read the instructions to the other member, who was holding the needles. The staff learned how difficult it is to grasp a new topic through verbal instruction alone. In another staff development we rhetorically analyzed parts of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail" and discussed tactics for tutoring writers with similar rhetorical analysis assignments. In both cases, our tutors learned more about their own writing techniques as well as how to work with the writers who come to talk with us.

FACTOIDS:

o Staff size: 22
o 4 general locations and 3 athletic study halls
o University enrollment: 40,000
o 3 credit, semester-long tutor training course
o Tutorials conducted: approx. 2600 per year
o Drop-in hours and limited appointment hours

The Director's Chair

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A Year of Adventure: Tutoring On-Line

by Leigh Ryan, Writing Center Director
and Donald Houck, Coordinator for Tutoring Services
University of Maryland

At the University of Maryland, University College, tutors have spent the last year tutoring on-line as part of a grant-funded project. From our perspective as tutors, this experience has revealed both advantages and disadvantages.

Many regular users of e-mail networks report that such communication tends to diminish hierarchical differences. Likewise, tutors report that students tend to open up and say more with on-line tutoring. Tutors and students who work together over time say they feel more like penpals. Clearly, this kind of tutoring also diminishes the intrusion of some stereotypes, for gender and race are ambiguous with some names, and age and class often cannot be detected. But on-line tutoring also means that tutors can't use other signals, like body language, to gauge the session's progression and make decisions about how to proceed. Humor and sarcasm prove especially difficult, and tutors must be particularly careful not to offend inadvertently. They report missing laughter!

While some tutors see the lack of verbal exchange as a disadvantage, others believe that students gain from having a written copy of the tutor's suggestions. On the other hand, written comments can sometimes seem more authoritative, permanent, and directive. Occasionally, lacking the ability to elucidate more information often confuses the tutor. Details that can be straightened out quickly in a face-to-face session, like ambiguous language, sometimes confound both tutors and students. In such cases, a tutor often e-mails brief questions to the student before continuing with comments. Likewise, students can use e-mail to request clarification when they receive the tutor's responses.

Certainly, on-line tutoring does not replace the traditional writing center. What it does, however, is make tutorial assistance available to many students who might otherwise be unable to take advantage of it. ⊙

Write It Down & Send It To Us!

"I WAS JUST THINKING . . ."

insights about the work we share

by Craig Johnson
Rollins College

Sometimes I think the Writing Center isn't about writing papers at all. I told a class that came [to the Writing Center] that the ticket to get[ting] into the Writing Center is an idea. You don't need to have a completed paper that has been revised fifteen times before you make an appointment. That's not what the Writing Center is about--if it were, we'd all be out of a job! An idea is what begins a paper. An idea is what begins the writing process. [As writing tutors], we usher ideas in, discuss them, and get them on their way to becoming part of a paper. . . ⊙

TALK BACK

A writer's comments

The last time I got help at the Writing Center, I was working on a poem. My problem was how to write the paper, even how to begin. I could have been making it harder than it really was but being clueless left me frustrated. The tutor I was with was really no help. The premise of her assistance was asking me, "What do you think?" I felt trapped once I was there. Being asked the questions was not helping, so I failed to see the point of the session. I realized I could be home asking myself the same questions and getting as far. I had no idea what the poem meant and even beginning was troubling me. What I was basically looking for was "Hey, look, I see you're struggling so here are a few suggestions on how I would begin." I wasn't looking for someone to write the paper, just someone to provide a method. I do not think that giving a few alternative ways of writing a paper is cheating. In my case, I just needed someone to uncork my bottle so my wine could flow. ⊙

Breaking Through Old Barriers

Working with Non-native Speakers of English

by Callie Hallmark
University of Montevallo

I have recently had the good fortune to be assigned a regular meeting time each week tutoring a foreign student in writing. I say "fortunate" because this young man is helping me to realize that some of the traditional English writing conventions are stale, over-used, and basically boring.

Over the years, certain phrasal expressions and word order choices have become typical of English dialogue and composition. As a result, sometimes it seems that all native English speakers sound alike. All too frequently, we unthinkingly place the subject before the verb or the complement, we position adjectives before the words they describe, and heaven forbid that we should ever ask a rhetorical question in the body of an academic essay! In our efforts to ensure coherence, the pitfalls of maintaining parallelism sometimes trap us into repetitive and stylistically monotonous text. To a certain extent, the creativity has been taken out of writing and replaced with something not unlike a computer program of composition which we automatically turn on whenever we sit down to write.

At my first tutoring session with Jan, an industrious, intelligent young man from Poland, I noticed a profound difference in his writing style and that of myself and most of my peers. Because he is not a native English speaker, Jan is not subject to the same built-in rules that those of us who grew up in American elementary schools find ourselves bogged down in. I was reluctant even to offer my advice, because I didn't want to interfere with his unique style and the beauty of his words. On the other hand, I was afraid that his professor might object to some of the ways he phrased his ideas because his style was so different—sometimes sounding almost incorrect by our traditional rules. In his essay, Jan uses commas to link together a string of adjectives describing America in a way that most native English speakers/writers would avoid. He states: *The primary reason I came [to America] was to perfect my English, but there was also something like a fascination with the place, on the one hand, so similar to Europe, on the other hand, so different, and because of this, so amazing.*

Somehow, I just couldn't bring myself to ask him to change very many of his words. This young writer had something I had been striving to find all my academic life--a unique style all his own that I believe an audience would find both charming and engaging.

I am glad, now, that I resisted the urge to overly revise Jan's work. I believe that we, as tutors, must be extremely cautious in the suggestions we make to our fellow students, or we may find ourselves changing an author's style or main ideas, rather than simply helping someone to better understand and use the writing process to their advantage. Particularly with non-native English speakers, I think that tutors should be painstakingly careful to ensure that we do not unwittingly change the whole idea behind the writer's words. Often, a foreign student may not know the right words to use to express the desired meaning. In this case, I feel that the best thing to do is to encourage the student to talk aloud about the idea he/she is trying to express and then write it down in his/her own words. This method will help to guarantee that the essence of the author's words is not lost through editing, and it will better preserve the student's creative style. ◆

There are some punctuations that are interesting and there are some that are not.
- Gertrude Stein

THE NAME GAME

Tutoring terms across the nation

We are:	We conduct:	We work with:
Peer Tutors	Tutorials	Writers
Writing Consultants	Consultations	Clients
Peer Helpers	Sessions	Students
Writing Assistants	Meetings	Tutees

Marketing Your Writing Center Experience

-or- How to Use the Writing Center in Your Job Hunt

by Shelby McClintock ('92)
Pennsylvania State University

o Include your tutoring experience in your work history. Several years at one job demonstrates consistency.

o Take stock of your writing center skills. As a tutor, you negotiate, advise, edit, collaborate, listen, and write. You know how to work as part of a team (with your co-workers) and you know how to work with a wide variety of people (with the writers). You can manage many tasks at once (you balance a heavy academic schedule with extracurricular activities and your job responsibilities.) Emphasize your diversity and adaptability!

o Remember to include these skills in your job descriptions for chronological resumes, or your skill areas for functional resumes. Don't forget about the extra things you do for the Writing Center. Include your time as the treasurer, or the fact that you developed promotional materials (posters and flyers) on your resume.

o Most employers are concerned about your ability to work as part of a team. Emphasize your collaborative experience. Discuss in detail how your ability to work with others on large and small projects will make you a valuable employee.

o If you have attended or presented at conferences, don't forget to include this in your resume and your cover letters. Public speaking and presenting are a part of any job eventually. Your already developed skills will be an asset.

o If you create any printed material for your center, be sure your name is on it somewhere. These will come in handy when you are asked for samples of your marketing work. (Even if you think you may never want to be in marketing, this may be the extra that gets you the job!)

o Ask your Writing Center Director to be a reference for you. Ask him or her to keep a record of your activity with the Writing Center on file for future reference (compose a list yourself). You might even ask for a general letter to take with you upon graduation. ⊛

Tutoring, Learning, and *Teaching*?

from the University of Maine
Writing Center Newsletter

I've been feeling extremely frustrated lately about my preconceptions on tutoring. At the heart of the matter, I believe, is the question of whether or not we are teachers. Despite all our best intentions and desires to the contrary, my final analysis is that, indeed, we are teachers, though perhaps not in the normal manner associated with that word. We certainly don't want students to leave having gained nothing from their visits, do we? Of course not. So, rephrasing things, in an admittedly provocative choice of words, we want students to *learn* from their experiences here. The unavoidable correlative is that someone must *teach* them. (Goodness, there's that hated word!) There are different definitions of "teach," though. In formalized courses, faculty members teach "to impart knowledge" or "to instruct." That definition implies a hierarchy of teacher over student, knowledge-possessor over knowledge-seeker. Our function as teachers, though, is "to cause to learn by example or experience." If faculty members are educators, then we are educational catalysts because, in a sense, we do educate. Using "educate" as a synonym for "teach," the *American Heritage Dictionary* (the same used above) notes that the former word "often implies formal instruction but especially stresses the development of innate capacities." Isn't the second half of that definition an accurate description of our purpose—to help develop students' innate capacities? Clearly, we do teach, though admittedly in a very different manner from the way faculty members teach. Our problem is what [a tutor] so accurately termed this afternoon an "overactive superego." We're so afraid of being likened to instructors and authority figures that we leap back at the merest hint of being associated with them. We may not instruct, train, or school our fellow students, but we do teach. How do I know for sure? Look up "teach" in *Roget's II*—it'll tell you to go to "educate." Go there and you'll find that one of its synonyms is "tutor." ⊛

NEWSLETTER STAFF
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The Dangling Modifier

Volume 1, Number 2 A National Newsletter by and for Peer Tutors in Writing Spring 1995

Welcome to the second edition of the national peer tutor newsletter: *The Dangling Modifier*! Some of you may be receiving this publication for the first time and we want to tell you about what it is and how it began.

The idea for this newsletter began at the 1993 National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Tutors from the Penn State Writing Center staff returned from the conference excited and inspired. "I wish we could do that twice a year," they chimed. "Wouldn't it be terrific to talk with tutors from other places more often during the year?" The tutors who had not been able to attend were also interested in the idea of "talking" with other tutors. And so the idea for a national newsletter was born.

We were not certain if other tutors would be interested in a national newsletter, so we decided to create a model and present it at the '94 National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing. We envisioned this newsletter as a publication *for* peer tutors and *by* peer tutors. We collected submissions from writing centers across the country and created the first issue of *The Dangling Modifier*.

Conference-goers responded positively to our idea. The conference was abuzz with talk of the new publication; tutors and directors alike were excited about the project! We asked for suggestions and criticisms and now we have used these comments to develop policies and, hopefully, a tradition that will make *The Dangling Modifier* a part of ongoing nationwide peer tutor conversation.

WE BELIEVE THAT *THE DANGLING MODIFIER* WILL PROVIDE PEER TUTORS IN WRITING WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK AND LEARN WITH TUTORS ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

We at Penn State would like to be instrumental in starting this newsletter, whose editorship will eventually be passed from one writing center to another. *The Dangling Modifier* will provide writing tutors with the opportunity to work on a large scale editing project, to write for a national publication, and to work and learn with tutors across the country. We are excited about the response we have gotten to this publication. We look forward to its continuing development! Please let us know what you think and get involved by sending us your comments, ideas, and submissions!

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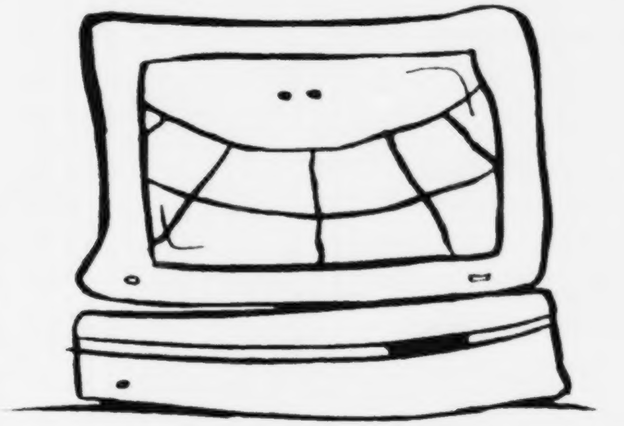
Get involved in the creation of your national newsletter...See your ideas in print!

Desktop Publishing: The Future of Tutoring

J. Darren Bishop
Indiana University of PA

As computer technology marches on, campuses nationwide are upgrading their computer labs with better and more complicated software. Desktop publishing is one of the newer phenomena in the software market and an increasing number of college writing centers and computer labs are acquiring these programs. With the flexibility and technical potential that desktop publishers offer comes the potential for new challenges for tutors. Students are coming in with more advanced problems -- both technological and textual. For colleges with writing centers that double as computer labs, like ours at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, it is becoming imperative that tutors upgrade their technical knowledge. Luckily for us, we've only installed our desktop publishing software in the computers at the tutor desk. This allows us to "play" with the program in order to get a better feel for it before we install it in all of the computers. At that point, students will ask new and more challenging computer questions.



However important it may be that we have the technical knowledge, the main function of our writing center -- like most -- is tutoring. Desktop publishing allows more advanced students to write more technical documents like manuals, newsletters, and even more effectively use fonts and spacing in "normal" essays. As this happens, students will demand of tutors a better knowledge of technical writing techniques. Students will begin to ask a new breed of questions: "Did I use white space effectively here?" or "How can I improve the visual layout of this paper in order to make it easier to understand?" Obviously this new mode of questioning has the potential to be more challenging than "Do I need a comma here?"

This is not to say that the job of the tutor is easy now. I merely wish to point out the potential which desktop publishing offers for more challenging -- and exciting -- tutoring sessions. As the world further hurls itself into the computer age, the world of the tutor must adapt. Desktop publishing offers the tutor not only a challenge for tutoring sessions, but also a chance to better his or her own skills in technical writing -- skills that can only help one's marketability in the "real world."

Top Ten

Reasons to be a Peer Tutor in Writing

10. Learn more about your own writing than you ever wanted to.
9. Where else can you work with so many great minds?
8. The paperwork's a breeze.
7. Kenneth Bruffee.
6. Finally get to learn the difference between a misplaced modifier and a dangling one!
5. Two words: Peer Tutor.
4. Finally get to understand the Freshman English assignments you had two years ago.
3. Can get involved in cool national publications, like *The Dangling Modifier*!
2. Always have access to style manuals.
1. Two more words: free pens.

Confessions of a UWC

Valerie Balling
Michigan State University

I need to make a confession. My job as an Undergraduate Writing Consultant is really reconnaissance work. I am stealing ideas for future use in my chosen profession as a high school English teacher. I am guilty of espionage, and I am proud of it.

Okay, my job is not really something out of a great spy novel, but I am collecting many wonderful ideas about writing that I cannot wait to use in my classroom. I like to think of myself as a *special* "agent of change" (as Kenneth Bruffee referred to peer tutors in his 1991 keynote address at the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing), because I am learning to be more collaborative in my work instead of relying on an authoritarian approach to teaching. Most of my undercover work takes place in writing consultations with student-clients. My informants (a.k.a. my clients) willingly offer vital information to me about their writing processes. They generally say they need help in the areas of finding a topic, organizing their information, and (although they rarely state it this way) accepting themselves as authorities on their own writing. Through my extensive research, I have been able to smuggle useful information away from these meetings.

All writers can attest to the fact that getting started is probably the most challenging part of the writing process. My informants have told me many times, "I just don't know where to begin," or, "I can't decide on a topic." Using Special Agent strategies, I ask the informants to brief me on their assignments as I boldly take notes in front of them so I have a copy of their words. As we continue the briefing session, I am able to notice a pattern of ideas or subjects that connect with each other. I continue to ask the informants questions even when the details seem so minor that they might not appear to be important. But, as any good spy knows, the key to the case can appear in the very ordinary. Once I have been well-briefed on the topic, I show the informants how much information they have shared with me and some of the patterns they have revealed. The informants are usually amazed at the wealth of knowledge they have and, once a connection is made, they begin to see for themselves the emerging topics of their papers. Silently, I sneak the "briefing technique" into my Special Agent files for future use. The informants simply need another person to help them write down all that resides in their heads. Once these writers are able to see how the process of finding a topic works, getting started is usually not so difficult.

THE WRITING PROCESS SHOULD NOT BE THOUGHT OF AS PAINFUL TORTURE, BUT AS INVITING AND INTRIGUING, LIKE A SPY NOVEL IN WHICH ALL THE CLUES BUILD UP UNTIL THE CASE IS SOLVED.

The writing process should not be thought of as painful torture, but should be thought of as inviting and intriguing, like a spy novel in which all the clues build up until the case is solved. As a Special Agent, my main responsibility is to facilitate the interaction between authors and their papers, which is usually difficult because students tend not to see themselves as authorities of their own writing. By working collaboratively with informants to understand the purpose of the paper and to make decisions about their own writing, I can help them increase their confidence and learn that writing is not really such an arduous task.

My confession is complete and my conscience is clear. I have retained all the information I dug up in my Writing Center work to use on my next assignment, which will be the most challenging one I have ever taken: infiltrating a high school English class. Fortunately, I am well prepared with these methods of collaborative instruction so that I can be a Special Agent of change when I am in the position of teacher. I am confident all will go well because collaborative teaching makes school more intriguing for the students as well as for the teacher. ***This spy business is really fun!*** ☙

The Director's Chair

Ron Maxwell
Penn State University

There's nothing quite like a writing project for a group of writing tutors! Producing *The Dangling Modifier* has brought welcome challenges to our Writing Center--some we anticipated, some we didn't. Positive responses to the newsletter in Birmingham last November -- where we first talked about our ideas with peer tutors and administrators from other centers -- charmed us into believing that the project would proceed without a hitch. So much for our naivete!

The flood of submissions to the newsletter did not spontaneously descend upon us in the months following our first call. A lesson lay in that response (or lack of response) that we were slow to learn. Although we knew peer tutors to be reliable sources for the right stuff, we hadn't calculated how much priming the pump would take. A further mailing didn't help much either. Material for the second issue came in only after we contacted writing center directors by telephone. Everyone remembered receiving our earlier invitation, most remembered talking with their peer tutors about the opportunity to submit. But nothing had come of it.

I think Ben Rafoth expressed the views of many when he said (in words something like these), "I know that all in our center support the concept of the newsletter, but I have not yet internalized the need to promote it. In the past few weeks alone I have talked with several writers about substantive issues in tutoring, but I did not urge them to write their ideas up for the newsletter. I must remember to do that in the future whenever our tutors express their valuable insights."

And I would hope that all center directors will do as Ben vows to do. Then, over time, peer tutors in dozens of centers will acquire the habit of writing and submitting material to *The Dangling Modifier*, thus helping us to make this publication the national forum for peer tutoring in writing that we expect it to become. But that means we must all begin again priming the pump. So, write on!

Mission Statement

The mission of *The Dangling Modifier* is to provide a national forum for ongoing conversation among peer tutors in writing. *The Dangling Modifier* is designed to stimulate discussion, to promote national peer tutor activities, and to share helpful information among writing centers across the country. The editorial staff will strive to select pieces that are interesting, controversial, unique, and well-written.

This will be the last free issue of *The Dangling Modifier*. Our special thanks for underwriting production and mailing costs of this number go to two Penn State friends of writing centers:
Prof. Margaret Lyday, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies, College of Liberal Arts, and Prof. James Rambeau, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education, Office of Undergraduate Education.

Write It Down & Send It To Us!

The Ideal and the Real

1995 National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing

Paul L. Little
Penn State University

The 12th annual National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing is scheduled to be held on the campus of Ball State University October 27 to 29, 1995. It will be cosponsored by East Central University and Ball State University. The conference theme, The Ideal and The Real, originates from the conflict between the peer tutoring ideal, which is grounded in collaborative learning theory, and actual peer tutoring practices.

More than thirty peer tutors from East Central and Ball State helped to plan the conference, which will feature peer tutor keynotes, two guest speaker keynotes, and entertainment. For the peer tutor keynote, tutors are invited to participate in a contest, submitting both written and audio versions of the keynote they would like to present. A panel of judges will select two peer tutors to give the keynotes at the Saturday banquet. Two guest speakers, Wendy Bishop and Muriel Harris, are tentatively scheduled to begin and end the Conference with keynote addresses. The Conference planners have scheduled a party in the hope of making the Conference even more entertaining for peer tutors.

Cindy Johanek, Ball State's Writing Center Director, says an information package including registration and tentative program information, will be available in the upcoming months.

Conference proposals are due May 15, 1995 and may follow any of several avenues, including, but not limited to, the following:

1. What are the values, attitudes, and beliefs behind the peer tutoring ideal, and how are they supported or denied by the realities of life in tutorial centers?
2. What do our traditional ideals suggest about direction for the upcoming realities of assessment, budget crunches, political conservatism, and technological advances?
3. How do the conflicts between the real and the ideal reflect on our individual centers and on the responsibility of our organizations?
4. What theories and practices have enabled us to reach our full potential, successfully managing the real and maintaining the ideal? What new theories and practices might better enable us to manage the conflicts?

The National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing is always an exciting educational and social event! Tutors gain valuable experience by presenting on and learning more about their practices by talking and befriending peer tutors from around the country. ☙

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW TO ATTEND OR PRESENT AT THE 1995 NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PEER TUTORING IN WRITING, PLEASE WRITE OR CALL

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From Tutoring to Teaching

Paul Mahaffey
University of Montevallo

When I began my first year of graduate school, I was asked if I would be interested in working in the Harbert Writing Center as a tutor. Although my answer was "yes," there was some reservation in the back of my mind. I had some strong ideas associated with the word "tutor." I envisioned a tutor as an exceptional student who helped those of us who could not grasp the concept of a particular subject. Even though I was an English major and I enjoyed reading and writing, I did not see myself as being able to tutor anyone.

This thought gave birth to the questions I often pondered as I conducted my first tutoring sessions. As a tutee sat there and listened to the observations, suggestions, and criticisms I made about the paper, I wondered whether or not anything I was saying was being understood. I also questioned my own credibility as I worked with a tutee. Would tutees hold me responsible if they did not get the grades they expected? Despite the training I went through prior to tutoring and the reassurance provided by the "veterans" of the Writing Center, these concerns were at the forefront of my thoughts.

However, as time went on, I began to realize that although a tutor is usually a student who is a bit more "in the know" on a particular subject, tutors are not expected to know everything. I observed that the atmosphere of the Harbert Writing Center was one of cooperation and consultation. If a tutor was not fully aware of a particular concept, there was no hesitation in asking another tutor for advice, even in the presence of a tutee. Needless to say, I soon felt more confident during tutoring sessions and this confidence was reflected in the faces of those I tutored.

The experience and training I received from the Writing Center was extremely influential in my decision to teach a freshman English class. With many hours of tutoring sessions under my belt, I began to direct a classroom through the fundamentals of writing. Although I was nervous , I just pretended that the class was really a group tutoring session and took it from there. Any success that results from the teaching career I have chosen has its roots in my writing center experience. ☙

Comma Usage Problems

Jennifer L. Meyers
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

It's just another typical session that begins with the request, "Can you look over my paper for punctuation errors, especially commas?" Automatically, I begin wondering if the writer is "comma happy" or "comma scared" and within the first few minutes, we're reading as if we have asthma. It's a "comma happy writer."

"The scientist suggested, that people need to conserve energy, which will then, help save the resources on the planet," The writer suggests rewording the sentence, breaking the sentence into two, or removing some commas. We are able to go through the rest of the paper without respiratory problems. Sure, there are still some questions about usage, but the writer can fix 80 percent of the errors. The writer now has the awareness that sentence flow, not to mention oxygen flow, is necessary for the reader.

Shortly after my asthma attack, I received the request again. This time, as the writer and I read through the opening paragraph, our faces had a tint of blue. Before we passed out, a comma appeared in the text and we took a gasp of oxygen. Again, we took the time to discuss why the reading of the text was not smooth. The writer took note that the reader had a lot of words to read before coming to the end of the sentence. By

-continued on p. 7

-continued from p. 6

focusing on one particular sentence, "The critic suggested that the author who is now on the best seller list was inspired by his family to write their history one that is quite interesting," the writer was able to recognize that several combined thoughts appeared and that they needed to be clarified. We were ready to continue reading the text, adding breaths of air when we needed them. Yes, there were still usage problems, but at least we were breathing.

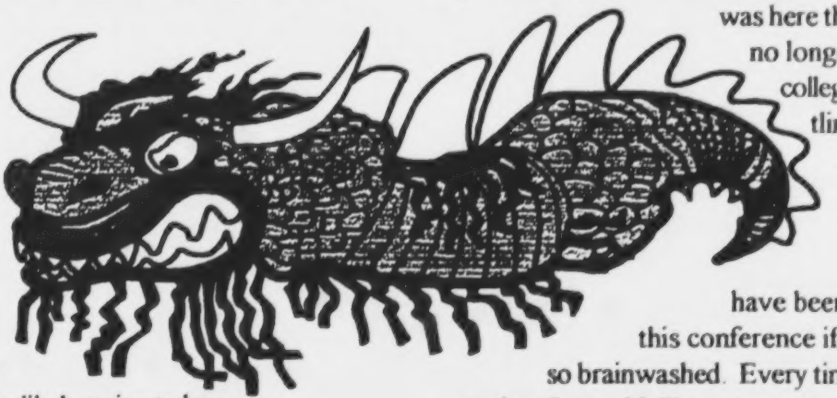
Comma usage is a typical problem. However, by giving the writer a chance to read the written text, he or she can easily recognize that problems exist within the piece. Furthermore, discussing the writer's options allows him or her to choose how the text is to be read. Finally, by giving the advice of "letting the oxygen flow" or "taking the time to breathe," I have found my respiratory problems minimized and the writer's correct usage of commas to be maximized. ☙

Let us know how you like The Dangling Modifier.
Send us your suggestions, praise, criticism.
What topics are you interested in reading about?

The Five Paragraph Monster

Debbie Ralston
Michigan State University

Well, I was hoping it would never happen, but alas the inevitable finally did. I went head-to-head with the dreaded five paragraph monster. At the beginning of a tutoring conference with Jane, I began to see the head of the monster but was hoping it would go away and hide. I spotted it in her outline; she only had three points she wanted to make in her paper. When I saw that her paper was likely going to be a five paragraph essay, I asked if her professor had made that stipulation in his assignment. When she shook her head, I thought maybe we could expand the paper by developing her ideas into more than five paragraphs, but my efforts were to no avail.



When I started giving suggestions for her paper, the monster fully appeared. Some of the suggestions I offered I thought were common sense ideas: introduce, explain and tie her quotes to the argument she was making, and explain everything as clearly as possible. However, once I made these suggestions, the monster simply bit right through them. According to Jane, she could not use any of these suggestions. If she did, then her paper would not conform to the way she had been taught to write papers in high school, where the monster had been born. As Jane explained, she could only have three main ideas, and two supports or sentences for each idea. When I told her that I had never heard of writing papers this way before, she looked at me like I was an alien. It was here that I realized I was no longer working with a college student, but battling with a monster, a monster who had Jane in its grip.

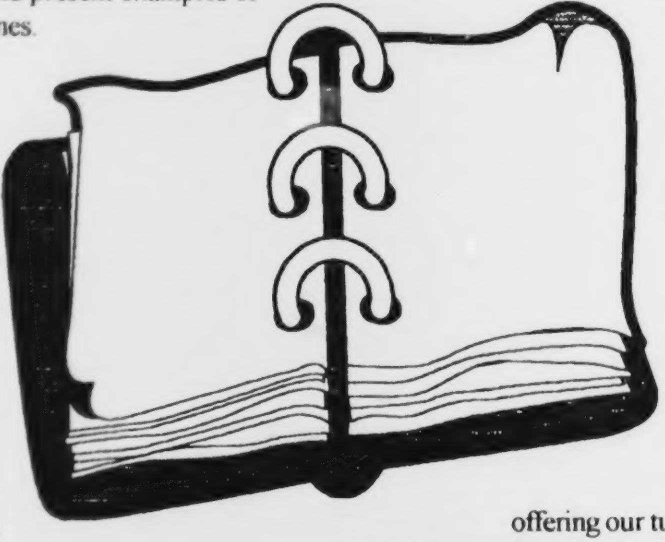
I would not have been so frustrated by this conference if she had not been so brainwashed. Every time I offered a suggestion, Jane said, "I can see your point, but I can't do that because..." She could only use a certain number of sentences for each idea. If Jane had refused my ideas because she did not agree with what I was saying or because she did not like my ideas, I could have dealt with that. What I could not deal with was that she was under the control of the monster, who had brainwashed her into believing she could only have a specific number of sentences for each idea. I had gone head-to-head with this monster, and lost. ☙

UVM Tutors Tackle Cross Disciplinary Writing

Michelle Richards
University of Vermont

Have any of you English majors ever had to tutor a chemistry lab report? Any bio majors been trapped in a session with a philosophy student? Well, scenarios like these were becoming more and more frequent at our writing center at the University of Vermont. We were discovering that despite the movement toward a writing standard across the curriculum, there are certain differences in format and style across the disciplines that cannot be ignored in tutoring sessions. Different patterns of thinking result in different patterns of writing. So, in an attempted solution to our frustration, five tutors envisioned a handbook, written by and for tutors, that would outline and present examples of writing in a variety of disciplines.

Our vision became a reality at the New England Writing Centers Association (NEWCA) Conference on March 4 in Nashua, New Hampshire. We presented the process of creating the handbook, from the initial vocalization of the problem to the compiling of information, and presented the audience with a prototype of the final product, a handbook entitled, "Writing Across the Disciplines, *An Insider's View*." The product was designed for the hypothetical tutor who has just realized that an upcoming session revolves around an unfamiliar subject area. With the handbook as a reference in the writing center, all the tutor needs to do is look up that subject to determine if any special formats or guidelines require adherence, glance at the sample text, take a deep breath, and go into the session feeling more relaxed and prepared.



After deciding that tutoring student papers in unfamiliar disciplines was a problem, we went through a number of steps to gather information for the handbook and to ensure its accuracy. We each tackled our own majors and made outlines of what we thought to be the most important qualities of writing in those areas. For example, psychology research reports must follow a specific five-part format, whereas philosophy papers must often follow a flow pattern, in which one argument flows into two opinions, which flow into more opinions, which all must be presented. To ensure that our ideas were on target, we met with professors from our disciplines in a panel discussion. We discovered similarities as well as striking differences among writing styles and formats, but in the meantime, gained the crucial understanding that writing *does* reflect a way of thinking.

The process of creating the handbook, which will now serve as a reference for current and future tutors, has led us to many discussions regarding the movement toward writing across the curriculum. Although it would be beneficial in some ways if writing was more uniform in all fields, there are several realities which present themselves in that argument. One of these realities, as we understood at the beginning of the project, but more fully appreciate now, is that writing reflects a way of thinking. If psychologists' thinking patterns differ from those of historians, the writing process, as well as the end result, will also differ. So by offering our tutors this handy reference, we will be moving toward a better understanding of all writing, and enlightening ourselves to the differing thinking patterns of our tutees, so that ultimately we can provide more valuable assistance in the writing center. ☙

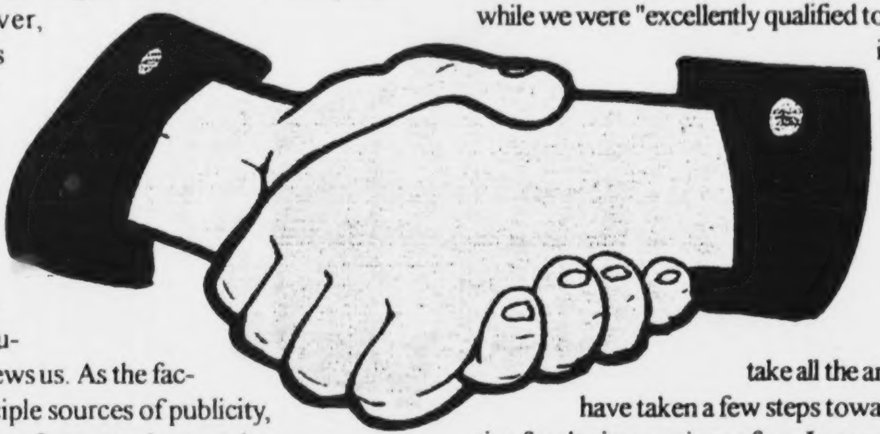
What kind of handbooks do you find helpful while tutoring?

Finding out What Instructors Think of Us

Kary Latham
Penn State University

While some college-level writing centers employ fifty tutors and others ten, and some see thousands of pieces of writing every year and others hundreds, they all have one thing in common business is never slow for long. Matching demand for tutoring with an appropriate supply inevitably becomes a breathless, time-consuming task. Despite the frantic nature of our work, we of course want to remain in prime tutoring condition.

At Penn State, University Park Campus (40,000 students), we've drawn up a short questionnaire allowing writers to evaluate us, and we observe one another two times each year to get feedback on our performance. However, there's not always energy left over for engineering "outreach" programs to university faculty, finding out how this influential part of our tutoring triangle views us. As the faculty are our principle sources of publicity, this constitutes an unfortunate shortcoming.



To find out more about what instructors think of us, a group of our tutors wrote a survey and sent it out to Fall 1994 instructors of composition courses. Our aim was to present our results at the November 1994 "National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing" in Birmingham, Alabama. Those of you who heard our presentation there will find the following summary of our results familiar going. Others may be surprised by our discoveries.

In response to "Why do you suggest that your students utilize peer tutor services," instructors responded predictably with answers like, "All writers can use advice," "I don't have enough time in my office hours to examine every student's paper thoroughly before it's handed in," and "Peer tutors understand the writing process." However supportive these answers were, when we asked for reasons behind *not* sending their students to us, we were a little taken aback. Some said we were "too reluctant to be authoritative and release knowledge," that we "provide inconsistent results," and "I can clear up the problem myself." We also designed a question about our qualifications to determine whether instructors knew how we are trained and whether our performance was sufficient. Most instructors determined that we were "excellently qualified," "fairly qualified," or somewhere in between. The more instructors knew about our training (tutors take a semester-long, three-credit course that includes an eight week tutoring practicum), the more confidence they had in our abilities. Some instructors found us "dedicated and interested," "well-trained, active and intelligent," and report that "students say service is helpful." Others said that while we were "excellently qualified to work on mechanics" we were "poorly qualified for advanced assignments. This dichotomy of responses characterized our entire survey.

We've tried to take all the answers to heart and have taken a few steps toward changing negative faculty impressions of us. In general, survey results have confirmed our suspicions that publicity efforts have not reached every corner of our campus, and reaffirmed our strong belief in communicating the work we do to a wider audience. If you'd like to know more about how we conducted this survey, or would like a copy of the survey itself, please contact us at the Penn State Writing Center, 219 Boucke Building, University Park, PA 16801. ❧

We'd love to hear how *your* writing center advertises *its* services!

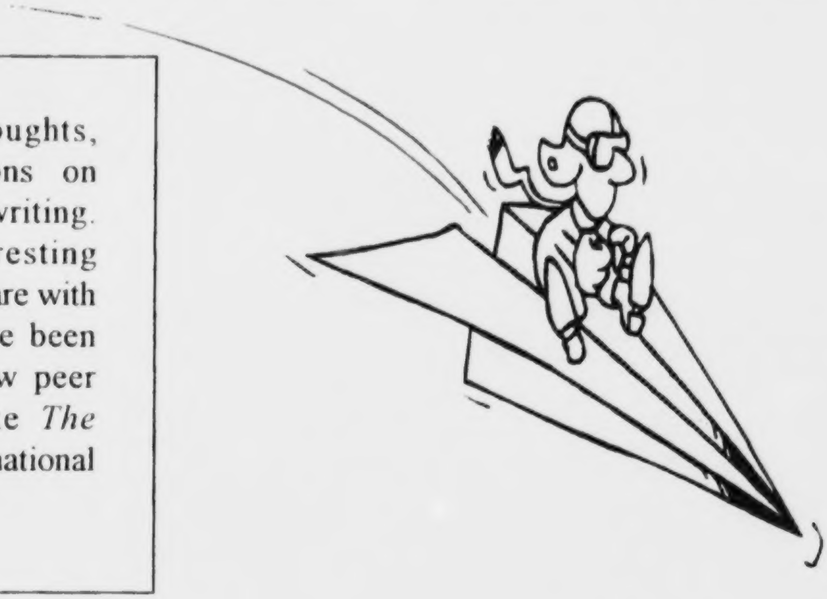
Submission Information

Submissions for the next issue of *The Dangling Modifier* should be submitted to the Penn State Writing Center. We welcome submissions 500 words or less and strongly encourage you to submit shorter pieces. Editors reserve the right to edit submissions for grammar and length. Please include your address and telephone number so we can contact you about any stylistic changes. Feel free to contact us by phone with any questions at (814) 865-1841.

Send submissions to:

Penn State Writing Center
219 Boucke Building
University Park, PA 16802
Fax: (814) 863-8704

Send us your thoughts, reflections, and questions on being a peer tutor in writing. Write down that interesting session you just had. Share with us the discussion you've been having with your fellow peer tutors. Help us make *The Dangling Modifier* the national forum we hope it will be.



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The Dangling Modifier

Volume 2, Number 2 A National Newsletter by and for Peer Tutors in Writing Spring 1996

Computers Help Revisions

By Josh Adair
Blackburn College

Recently, I have been working with a student who came to the writing center for help with revisions of sentence-level problems; however, I have been working with him in a totally new way. Generally, this student has difficulty with sentence-level revisions because he cannot conceptualize how to correct a paper when it is covered with comments from the professor. To get around this problem, I have found an interesting and useful method — use the computer.

When this student comes to me for help with a revision, we start by discussing the comments on the paper. This process is semi-helpful. However, this student often still has difficulty grasping the directions of the comments. He usually stares at me blankly as I ask, "Do you understand?" In order to combat the "I dunno" syndrome, I sit in front of the computer and ask him to sit beside me, so that he can see the monitor. I generally do the typing because his typing skills are poor and his ideas flow too quickly, so he loses his train of though when he tries to do his own typing. Thus, I can concentrate on typing while he concentrates on forming sentences. We work through the paper, usually line by line, discussing what would sound more effective. Then, we discuss grammatical and syntactical errors. Finally, when we have discussed all of the problems with the original sentence, he forms a new, more effective sentence — he then dictates this sentence to me, complete with punctuation, and I type it into the computer. This method works more effectively because we get more accomplished in a short period of time.

Why is this method effective? I believe it works because this student can explain clearly what he thinks and we can discuss the problems with the paper as we encounter them — however, the student must be willing to speak freely with me. More outgoing students tend to like "talking out" their revisions better — shy students do not do as well because they are not as willing to discuss their ideas. Plus, the process of tediously writing and correcting grammar are alleviated. The student tells me what should be written and I can type it into the computer quickly. In addition, once the sentence is on the monitor, the student can see what he has created and decide whether or not it should be kept or deleted. Finally, this process is productive — this student leaves with much of his revision completed instead of stumbling out of the writing center with my explanation and a dumbfounded stare. I swear by this process, and so does this student; he has raised his revision grades from C's to A's. "I love it!" he says.

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"Anxiety/ownership transference" and the Good Person/Bad Tutor

By Carolyn Fortner Goh
University of Montevallo, Harbert Writing Center

How does one react to a student who comes into the writing center with an assignment due exactly thirty minutes from the time the student steps into the writing center? Should Tutor Extraordinaire "fix" the obviously bad paper or should Tutor Extraordinaire "hold the party line" and insist that ownership of the paper belongs to the desperate student?

I was faced with the above dilemma when a student came into our writing center with a good, but rough, final draft of a cover letter and résumé she had prepared for a business class. Ten minutes into the tutoring session, I had made some comments to the student on her need to add sentences here and to shorten sentences there. I had even asked pithy, Socratic questions to help the student clarify her ideas for the inevitable rewrite. But when I began to leave the student so that she could do some of this rewriting, the panic I had felt underlying our tutoring session exploded: "But this is due in fifteen minutes!"

Sitting down with the student and purposefully pushing the paper in her direction, I again brainstormed with her about ways to rewrite and clarify. Creasing her brow and staring at her assignment, the student folded her arms and look distraught: "I just don't know." And to torment me further, she added, "And it's due in ten minutes — and I still have to type the changes."

At the time, I could not understand why I felt so responsible for this student's assignment. Things happened so quickly. A kind of "anxiety/ownership transference" or "student/tutor symbiotic stress osmosis" had occurred. Pulled into a vortex of anxiety, I did what any good person/bad tutor would do: I fixed the paper. Of course, I did enough tutorial "mumbo-jumbo" so that I did not feel that I had fixed the paper: "Now, these are just suggestions," I told my student as I wrote complete sentences onto her paper. "You don't have to use these suggestions if you don't want to."

Yeah, right.

Shortly after my (now) happy student left with her corrected assignment, I felt miserable. "Have I been totally manipulated, or what?" I thought. And I could just hear the student tell her professor, "But that's not wrong. The graduate student in the writing center wrote that for me."

Ugh. What I have since rediscovered is that in order to be a good tutor, sometimes I have to be a "bad" person. In other words, I have to risk that students will be angry when I insist that they take responsibility for their own writing and for their own anxiety. I knew this, of course, while I was tutoring the student described above. I just allowed myself to become too involved, too "sucked-in" by those desperate brown eyes.

Now when confronted with "anxiety/ownership transference," I — though sympathetic and even nurturing — hold the party line: the student is responsible for his or her own paper.

Tutoring Objectively

By Victoria Roger
Suffolk Community College

One of my students brought in a quote from Plato's Apology, "The life which is unexamined is not worth living." As I sit here, trying to think of something to write that would qualify as a reflection on working in a writing center, I am forced to re-examine myself, my values, and my outlook.

The students I work with represent all aspects of an adult society. I have worked with kids right out of high school and returning students old enough to be my grandparents, covering the full spectrum of possible socio-economic and racial backgrounds. I am not sure who had learned more from these encounters, the students or me. My students, hopefully, come away with a greater understanding of writing skills, and an increased faith in their abilities. I am left to ponder my own life as seen through the perspective of their papers.

Most of the papers I see have some basis in personal opinion, whether or not this was the assignment. Students tend to reveal themselves in the choices they make, in the things they say (or leave unsaid), and in the view and the voice they bring to an assignment. When working with a student, I cannot help but be affected by what I see. It is difficult to think that my life is hard, or that my lot is unfair, when I read a paper about a little boy who was beaten with an electric cord because he "got out of line," or to consider my husband insensitive when I read about a boyfriend who punched his pregnant girlfriend in the stomach and then walked away. My student leaves, happy that she now knows that she needs a comma after a subordinate introductory clasue, and I sit and watch her go, amazed at the life story she revealed to me. I always knew that tragedies really did happen in people's lives, but I never knew that the people they happened to often did not know that they were tragedies. My problems, the things I thought were important, suddenly seem very trivial.

It is sometimes difficult to remain objective when I read students' papers. I have read papers which disagreed with everything I stand for, everything in which I believe. I have had to bite my tongue and comment on grammar while being very careful to keep my opinions to myself. In this way, too, I am often forced to reconsider my views. When I read a well thought out, reasonably argued paper that is completely at odds with my views, I have to re-evaluate those views.

Working in a writing center makes me examine my life and my beliefs regularly and consider what is really important. It makes me realize that there are intelligent, well-educated people who disagree with me. It also makes me realize that I have no answers, only more questions.

Modern Language Association Documentation

By Charles Kovach, Instructor
San Diego City College

I was an English tutor at San Diego City College for six years before I became an English instructor there. I now also conduct training workshops for City College English tutors. When I was an English tutor there, I noticed that students who were required to use Modern Language Association (MLA) documentation in their papers often used other styles of documentation.

Students learning MLA were often confused because they read articles and books not documented according to the MLA style current at that time. While students were learning to use Works Cited pages and parenthetical citation to document sources according to MLA, they were reading books and articles using footnotes and end notes to document sources. Also, students were reading articles documented according to the American Psychological Association (APA) style. To help students understand MLA better, I showed them articles documented according to other styles and explained that the documentation they encounter in their reading could differ from MLA style and that they still needed to follow MLA if their instructors required it.

Regardless of which documentation style a student is using for a class, a tutor can help to alleviate some of the confusion surrounding appropriate documentation by showing the student the different styles of documentation.

Tutor Training Practicum: A Family Experience

By Kathleen Perkins
University of Southern Indiana

Our English 490 Tutor Practicum class met as a group for two hours each week. During those sessions, we reviewed theory and discussed our class projects, but, most importantly, we shared our experiences with each other. A remarkable phenomenon occurred during those sessions: we blended together into a single, yet diverse group. We became a family.

The sense of family among peer tutors grew with the sharing of tutoring experiences and the challenges of our own writing. In the sharing, we vented frustrations, rejoiced over accomplishments and analyzed perceived failures. We laughed, we encouraged, we argued, we celebrated. Differences of race, sex, and age were erased by our commitment to our program goals and to each other.

During our bonding process, the personalities of the tutors broke through in subtle, sublime ways. Some tutors excelled in grammar, others in organization, still others in planning or "inventing." Our diversity and uniqueness, interwoven with our common love of writing and our desire to serve our students, formed each of us into a complete peer tutor. As within a family, the personalities of the tutors enhanced one another. The tutor blessed in the ability to organize and build resembled a father figure supporting a family structure. Keeping the essay focused and on the right track reflected a maternal influence. Some tutors brought life and playfulness into the serious, dull subjects. They put excitement, exploration, and intrigue into tutoring, much like young sons seeking new adventures in the back yard. Still others wove words around important issues without creating disrespect, much like the daughter who sweetly wraps her father around her little finger. The list of complex abilities continues into the maelstrom of peer tutor personalities, ever whirling, changing, and creating.

All the parts described are not separate tutors, but all tutors. We each have strengths and weaknesses that bring the peer tutor family into wholeness as the separate units of parent, son, or daughter merge into one family. As the family is the guardian of humanity, tutors become the guardians of shared words and lives, even if just for a short lifetime.

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

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Penn State University Writing Center
219 Boucke Building
University Park, PA 16802

A Moment for Reflection

By Bridget M.Schulte

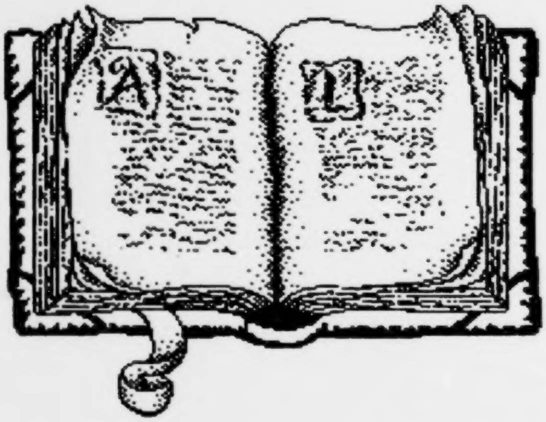
Colorado College

Writing tutors are hired not only for their ability to work well with their fellow students, but also (in my experience) because of their love of writing. For many people, writing can serve as a connection to the world, an escape from it, or an outlet for the gripes that build in everyday existence. It can function in much the same way a self-help group does, allowing the writer to work through their ideas or feelings. Writing gives the writer a sense of creation as well as a sense that someone out there might actually read the creation.

Our Writing Center at Colorado College provides its tutors with an open writing forum in the form of our Tutor Journal. The Tutor Journal is a nondescript, dark green spiral notebook. If you didn't know what it was (or missed the title boldly written across the front cover), you may think some student might have left it sitting on our coffee table. Within it, however, are not the notes from some class that is now set at the wayside, but the musings, wanderings and commentary of our centerís tutors.

Its first entry begins with a recount of one of the banes of my own tutoring existence: this-paper-is-due-in-an-hour syndrome. The next entry is a bored musing of a tutor on his Friday shift. Another lauds our computerized Writer's Helper program. A fourth is titled Ron Capen's Luncheon and contains the notes from one of our biology professor's lectures given at our lunch meeting regarding his views on the biology senior thesis. Throughout the journal are sprinkles of random humor and random confusion and lots of random philosophy. Most of the entries in some way relate to what it is to be a tutor, and there are many things only a tutor would find interesting and possibly amusing. Itís almost as if we have our own running magazine with just us CC tutors as writers and readers.

Perhaps this journal is simply an archaic, pre-on-line form of a chat room, but there is something so much more personal in it. It holds the handwriting of the tutors that contributed to it. It holds the ideas of tutors who have sat in the same chairs I've sat in and encountered the same problems. It is a place to go when you can't whine at the secretary or the director about that awful session you just finished. Sometimes a journal entry will call for a response and get one. And our journal is full of tutors reflections on what it is to tutor here, at this little liberal arts college, under this system, often with these professors. The writers in it have had relatively the same training as I did, and, perhaps, what I am trying to say is that we have a bond. And sometimes in this world of originality, diversity and difference, it is good to know there are also people out there with whom you have something in common.



National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing

October 25-27, 1996 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Keynote Speaker: Christina Murphy, Texas Christian University

Theme: Exploring Complexity

Peer tutors work in a mosaic of sites, roles, and disciplines with a full spectrum of perceived authority. They tutor writers with awide range of abilities, backgrounds, and challenges. This conference theme will help us focus on the personal and institutional complexities of peer tutoring and on how we prepare and renew ourselves for this work.

Proposal information: Please submit a 250 word description of your presentation, workshop, panel or roundtable. Indicate if your presentation is intended for an audience new to peer tutoring or for one that has an established program. Identify the speakers and their roles within your institution. Your proposal will be included in the conference program. We strongly encourage proposals from peer tutors.

Send proposals by June 10 to:

Molly Wingate, NCPTW Program Chair
Colorado College Writing Center
14 E Cache la Poudre Ave.
Colorado Springs, CO 80903
e-mail: mwingate@cc.colorado.edu
phone: (719) 389-6742; fax: (719) 634-4180

Registration information: (Registration fees include a Friday reception and a Saturday night banquet)
Before October 1, 1996 — students $35 and directors $70
After October 1, 1996 — students $40 and directors $75

Accommodations will be available at the conference site, an Embassy Suites Hotel, for $89 a night (up to 5 people in a room, free breakfast).

For registration and accommodation information and forms, please contact:

Kevin Davis, NCPTW Site Chair
Writing Center
East Central University
Ada, Oklahoma 74820
phone: 405-332-8000
e-mail: kdavis@mailclerk.ecok.edu

Conversations of Complexity

By Jeff Tieman
Colorado College

Like anything worth the effort, tutoring writers is rarely simple and straightforward. You can read books on effective communication or even peruse the multitude of texts which have been written on the subject of peer tutoring in the writing center. You can have theoretical conversations about how to work with people of different ability levels or personality types. Mock sessions offer the opportunity to practice and test those theories. You're ready to face anything - or at least you think so. Then you start tutoring real, live people with real, live problems. One of the tutors in our writing center did not get past his first session before the student with whom he was working asked about his age and qualifications.

For this year's conference in Oklahoma City, Molly Wingate (director of the Colorado College Writing Center, and my favorite boss) has selected the topic of "Exploring Complexity." With this broad designation, she has intentionally left tutors lots of room to do whatever they want. This is our chance to add complex issues to the already long list. More importantly though, the conference will be a forum where we can teach and learn from each other ways of handling this exciting but constantly changing job of ours.

Every one of us has "freaked out" on occasion. Maybe the writer doesn't know we are in the throes of a tutoring dilemma because we manage to stay so calm, but we are wrecks. Questions perhaps no one can answer soar through our confused tutor brains. "What was I taught to do when they ask me to predict a grade for their paper? Why is this guy asking me to do so much work? Why is this woman crying about her terrible roommate?" Training courses can never address all these questions because no one, not even the people writing the books, has experienced it all. In the academic world, very little can be classified into the category of simplicity. Professors write page-long assignments and mention ten supplementary questions in class. Some professors are wild about commas and others will drop you a letter grade for not using gender-neutral language. As part of the collegiate environment, the writing center has to confront all of these challenges as well as deal with the dynamics of its own unique and often complicated atmosphere. We wonder if we are doing too much or not enough for the people we tutor. We dread the writers who make us crazy or irritate us to a headache.

Thankfully, we have built-in therapy options. We can complain to and ask advice of each other at weekly meetings, or write in the tutor journal if we have trouble venting via conversation. Also, like many other professions, be have an annual conference that lets us meet dozens of tutors with perspectives we have not yet considered. Conferences are fun and energizing, but perhaps their best feature is that of empathy. It is comforting to know that others experience the same tribulations that you do, deal with the same serious issues, and get the same rushes and the same headaches.

Since almost everything we do in the writing center is far from simple and is often perplexing, Molly Wingate hopes the conference will offer its attendees new ideas about those foggy, difficult situations all of us find ourselves in every day. Perhaps the best way to prepare for this event is to watch yourself tutor and listen to the joys and moans of your colleagues. This is the substance of great presentations as well as the fuel for questions all of us can help each other answer.

If our jobs weren't complex, we probably would not enjoy them as much as we do. As someone who will be graduating in less than two months, I have to prepare to enter a real world which, I am quickly learning, is much more complex than I would prefer. Understanding and accepting that complexity is the best way to manage it, in the writing center and everywhere else.

Don't Touch That Pen!

Laying Off the Ink

By Shalin Hai-Jew
South Seattle Community College

When a student approaches me with a paragraph, business letter, or essay, my right hand — as a reflex — begins to twitch. It begins to ball up in the pen-holding position, and I find myself with a cheap blue Bic in hand marking spelling, grammar, syntax, and mechanic mistakes.

A year at the South Seattle Community College Writing Center has taught me to lay off the pen. Several factors brought this about-face.

First, writing is primarily about substance, ideas, creativity, and originality. Only later do issues of organization, clarity, and secondary support come in, and finally the editing and mechanics. Dealing with a student's paper with pen in hand encourages the marking of the minutiae and possibly a mis-focus of the larger issues of the ideas and actual revision.

Second, I would see many repeat users of the Writing Center who would make a beeline for me — bypassing all the many other talented tutors with their different approaches and insights. Paper in hand, they would say, "Correct this for me." They would bring out their former paper and show how well they'd done, or grumble about editing mistakes I'd left behind. My "rep" on the campus became one of the tutor to go to for a "quickie." Was I becoming a crutch for students who needed to learn editing skills for themselves?

Third, English instructors began grumbling about just how "cleaned up" students papers were, and that some were getting mysterious "outside help." Were they referring to me? Possibly. A Writing Center needs to be a support, not a one-stop Do-It-All-For-You for students. I could learn from an instructor who would not even mark his students' literary critique papers, but would speak into a cassette recorder on the content. That concept works in a Writing Center where a student's ideas and output may be reflected on in order to provide the students with an "ideal reader."

Fourth, not having a pen in hand helps me show students that they're the ones who must ultimately make the decisions — not any outside force. There's something terribly compelling about taking responsibility for oneself which enhances learning.

I will be there to help students towards appropriate reference texts like the clerk at the gas station with the map; to help then — lost wandering souls — muddle through English computer programs as well as word-processing software; to unclog the mental drain with brainstorms, listing, clustering, free-writing, and encouragement for class assignments; to fit papers into rhetorical modes sometimes the way Cinderella's sisters stuffed their feet into the glass slipper; to make former thugs and thugettes sound like new-born gentlemen and gentlewomen in business memos and professional letters with nudging and tweaks, but I will no longer do their work for them.

Sacred Signals

By Morningfire Myers
Southern Illinois University

We all respond to and with body language. Babies do it, cats and dogs do it, even goldfish do it. And, yes, peer writing tutors do it, too.

Before you poise your passive pen, the tutee smells your intentions, and you instinctively know your reaction to this temporary partner in a serious, albeit brief, process. We are on holy ground in a Writing Center. Sniff the incense of creativity. Sit close to the creator. Participate in this sacrament deferentially, courteously, reverentially.

Body language never lies. Each tutee is as fluent in this primary form of communication as each tutor. Differences in age, gender, race, culture and cologne speak volumes to these temporarily yoked two. Yet, we ordained tutors whip out our pointy little weapons and immediately attack the suppliant's most precious offering. Ouch! Blood on the page hurts even when the cuts are meant in kindness. Indeed, sacrificing small parts of our body of writing - yea, verily, even tiny fragments are painful, despite the restorative properties of the rite. Watch that preachy or superior manner, Dr. Grammar and High Priestess of Style. Somehow, we cannot ignore that an evaluation is affected. Tread tenderly on this spiritual spot. Approach your tutee respectfully. Breathe in his or her fears. Breathe out your confidence in his or her forthcoming healing. Allow your tutee to teach you. Ask about something he or she knows a great deal more about than you do. Show with your eyes that you are glad to receive this new information. Very glad. And that it is baffling. Recall that befuddlement as you make use of your passive pen.

Give and Take

By Kathi Marsan
University of Cincinnati

The whole concept of being a peer tutor is to help other students overcome obstacles in their writing techniques, to assist them with revisions to get a better grade, to help meet deadlines, or to help with basic editing. No, this is not a glamorous job, nor are there any awards given for a job well-done. While there are not tangible awards that can be displayed for all to see, there are many rewards to be attained by any tutor who is motivated. To be good tutors we give of ourselves anything that can be learned during the tutoring session. Keeping a positive attitude and always striving to learn at least one new thing from each tutee will help us all be better tutors.

It is my goal, as I hope it is for all other tutors, to gain some knowledge, understanding, or reinforcement of writing skills every time I have a tutoring session. This is not always easy to do. How can I possibly learn something from every person who comes into the lab? Motivation is the key. Motivation stems from a positive attitude. A good attitude improves productivity and projects a more positive image, which in turn will put the tutee at ease and make them confident in your ability to help them. Let's face it, weíve all had a tutee who doesn't want to be there but is required to be by a professor. There is a brief moment when you can either allow the tutee's negative attitude to control the session, or you can get creative and try to turn it around to get some positive results.

HERE ARE A FEW DO'S AND DON'TS FOR TUTORING WITH A POSITIVE ATTITUDE:

Do:

☐ Greet each new student with a smile.
☐ Take the time to find out what they need from you.
☐ Ask a lot of questions.
☐ Make positive comments about their paper whenever possible.
☐ If you made similar mistakes, share your secret to overcoming them.
☐ Relax and don't make the tutee feel rushed.
☐ Always invite them to come back.
☐ Expect to learn something.

Don't:

☐ Make them feel they are bothering you.
☐ Assume you know what they need or want to do.
☐ Hesitate to seek information if you are not confident in any area.
☐ Let them leave the lab without first confirming that they understand the corrections you have made together.
☐ Write the paper for them — you won't be doing them a favor.

The Writing Ladder

By Emily Mueller
University of Cincinnati

It was a late Thursday afternoon when a student entered the peer tutor lab. He was writing an essay in which he had to grapple with both sides of a controversial topic. The essay's structure was very loose, and he tended to wallow back and forth between opposing sides. The essay also lacked several fundamental concepts that are necessary for freshman English students to know. I posed questions to the student about using a thesis, transitional sentences, topic sentences and a conclusion. The student's puzzled look was more than enough evidence to prove that he wasn't familiar with these important concepts. But much to my surprise, I found that he was following his assignment exactly. Apparently his professor didn't care about structure; in fact, according to the professor, the less structure, the better! Despite this teacher's leniency, however, the student seemed confused knowing that he need not bother with these structural concepts.

Following a format, especially for incoming English students, makes the writing experience feel safer. Why is this so? Because when they are provided with a format they know exactly what is expected from them and how to put it in writing. On the contrary, those students who are handed a blank sheet of paper and told to write are left in the dark. Thus, it is no surprise to peer tutors that the main goal of English 101 is to let the writer experiment with basic concepts. In this setting, structure in an essay is only a guide which allows the writer to use his or her own thoughts. Learning to write in a structured environment helps students explore their ideas with some degree of safety and control.

The student I mentioned above, who was not provided with a safety net of basic organizational skills, came into the lab more frequently than any other student. He had no idea where he should begin his papers. We spent hours over the course of one week discussing different routes and possibilities for his essay. He once mentioned that he wished his professor had given him guidelines to follow. I gave him guidelines that showed him what a thesis was, where it might be placed, how to start an introductory paragraph, and how to conclude an essay. His attitude shows that writing is a gradual learning process, and that a student must work his or her way up the writing ladder. In light of this learning process, structural concepts should be a precursor to freedom in writing.

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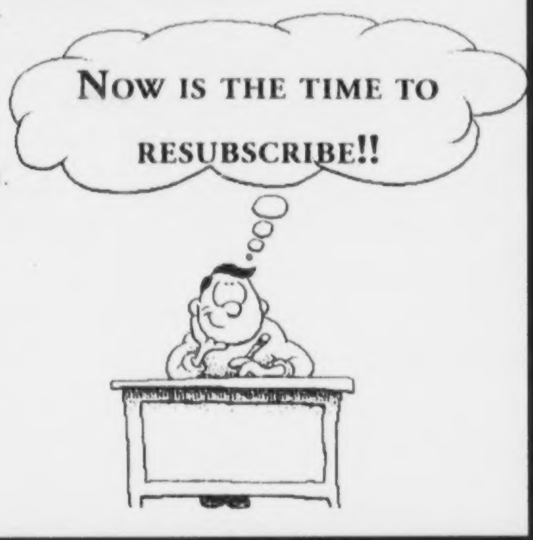
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The Dangling Modifier

Volume 3, Number 1 A National Newsletter by and for Peer Tutors in Writing Fall 1996

Body Language and Eye Contact

By Maureen E. Sanford

Suffolk Community College, Smithtown, NY

A lot can be learned about people by observing their body language. Just look around the Writing Center and see the different postures and poses. You see a tutor sitting back in a chair, arms folded across his or her chest, while a student is talking to the tutor. What would you deduce from this scene? Or if you see a student with arms folded while the tutor is talking? How about a tutor and student close together, heads almost touching, looking down at a paper?

Body language can be an important clue in determining if a session is going well or not. I perceive a student or a tutor sitting back in the chair with arms folded as a poor session. There is too much space between tutor and student. Someone seems to be on the defensive or not really interested in what the other is saying or doing. On the other hand, if a tutor and a student are close together, the paper between them and their heads near each other, I perceive this as a good session because both people are involved with the task before them.

As the tutor, I want students to perceive my willingness to help them. I make a conscious effort to be aware of my own body language, as well as the body language of the student. I start my sessions with a smile and introduce myself by name. If the student extends a hand, I shake it. I sit next to the students, not across from them. As I begin to ask about the assignment, I lean forward and rest my hands on the table in order present myself as an open-minded, receptive person, who is ready to listen. Usually, students respond positively by leaning toward me.

When a student reads a paper to me, I want to see what the student is reading because very often students add or change words they think they wrote but didn't. In order to follow along, I will move closer. If the student seems uncomfortable and/or self-conscious, I back off slightly to give the student more space. It is essential to remember that not everyone feels comfortable close to another person, so be careful not to impose yourself into the student's "own space." But do not distance yourself so that the student feels you are trying to get away. Use your own judgment and adjust to each student and session.

Lastly, remember that eye contact is very important during a tutoring session. Eye contact allows you to show the student that you are paying attention to what he or she is saying. It also allows you, the tutor, to see if there is confusion or doubt, as well as understanding or confidence, on the part of the student. So, make sure you look at the student and make eye contact frequently when either of you is speaking. ✍

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THE DANGLING MODIFIER is produced in association with the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing

A High School Perspective on Peer Tutoing:

My Peer Tutoring Adventure with the Non-Responsive Client

By Alexis Kaminsky
Manhasset High School

It's Tuesday. I arrive in the Writing Center a few minutes before the bell rings to tell the teacher who is there that I will be on duty and to sign my name on the board.

A junior high class arrives, and their teacher explains the assignment to me. They have all read biographies and will be giving oral presentations on them this week, but first they must fill out sheets and type up sentence outlines which they will use as notes for their presentations. I understand the assignment and ask if anyone needs help. No one does. I sit...and sit...and sit....Finally, I hear my name and practically jump out of my seat. I walk over to the source of the voice.

"Hi, do you need help?" I ask in what I hope comes across as a friendly tone.

A simple shake of the head is the only reply that I receive from the silent student.

"Okay, if you do, I'll be over there." I return to my chair, flip open the binder labeled LIVES WORTH KNOWING and read.

A few minutes later, the teacher asks me to help the silent student. She tells me I can write down on his sheet what he dictates to me. I sit and look at the sheet. The teacher has divided the project into very distinct sections; all the kids have to do is write a few short sentences about their person's early life, school years, career, defining moments, and the people who have influenced him or her. My client has already filled in facts about the early life of the person in his biography, but his sheet is almost entirely blank. My client's book is on a basketball player; I have no clue who he is. Silently I start to think that this may be more of a challenge than I originally thought.

"So______, did, um...Hakeem go to college?"

He nods and gives me a look that clearly shows me that my help is not wanted.

"Well, what did he study?"

He shrugs his shoulders and looks over at the other side of the room. I am starting to have a sinking feeling in my stomach—maybe I'm not such a great peer tutor.

"Well, what did you think was important that happened to him while he was in college?"

Another shrug, this time followed by a sigh and a look of combined boredom and misery. I don't know what to do. I am frantically searching for some clue on the page that sits before me, but I find no help there. I am near the point of desperation, but I refuse to give up—at least, not yet.

"Well, did he have a hard time in college?" I'm really fishing now.

He nods, and I think, well, here we go again.

"Why?" I expect to receive another shrug and a dirty look.

"He didn't speak English very well." I can barely hear the quiet voice that finally speaks. "And he had to work to pay for college."

"What do you want to say about that in your

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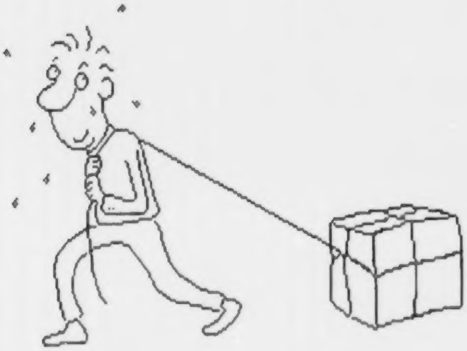

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presentation?"

My no longer silent client speaks again, and I write frantically. My client actually knows quite a bit about the person he has studied, and he know what he wants to say; I just have to pry it out of him. There is no easy back and forth between us. It is all work and no fun, and I do not feel as if I have made this student any more receptive to peer tutors. I am completely depressed; I feel like I have failed, and the session seems to have been the farthest thing from a model peer tutoring session. I glance down at the end of the period to see that my client's sheet is almost entirely filled with his own ideas and words, and I think that maybe I'm wrong. ✍

Taking a Stand:

Should We Tutor Creative Writing at the Writing Center?

By Tess Thompson
Penn State University

People bring all sorts of work to the Writing Center; on any given day, a busy tutor might see a personal statement, a rhetorical analysis, or a doctoral dissertation about the mechanics of drilling holes. Sometimes a tutor will even find someone who wants help with a piece of fiction or a poem. Although at first this task may seem easy, tutoring a creative work raises issues that we don't usually encounter as peer tutors and that we are not trained to deal with. Due to the nature of our peer tutoring program, I believe that creative writing does not have a place at the Writing Center.

The training we receive as tutors at the Writing Center prepares us to tutor writers of expository, rather than creative, writing. In our training class, we study typical assignments for composition classes that all university students must take. These assignments are all similar in that they have well-defined criteria for evaluation. Even though peer tutors should not evaluate a writer's work, they can help the writer to discover how to improve a paper only if they have a general idea of the evaluation criteria. A successful rhetorical analysis, for example, uses passages from the text to demonstrate the author's use of ethos, logos, and pathos. Most of us will agree that a poorly structured

(continued on page 8)

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mail: The Dangling Modifier, 219 Boucke Bldg., University Park, PA 16802; e-mail: tlb171@psu.edu; or fax: (814) 863-9814.

Any questions? Please call us at (814) 865-1841.

Sharing the Peer Review Process With Other Students

By Pei Shen

Penn State University

Penn State's Writing Across the Curriculum Program has greatly increased the demand for our services. Each semester, our staff of 20 peer tutors sees about 1400 students in our three centers. With our limited resources, we have been challenged to come up with new ways to meet the need for our services. One new venture is the in-class peer review workshop.

As peer tutors in writing, we posses an important skill that all students, not just peer tutors, can learn. This skill is the ability to peer review. However, most students who take writing courses at Penn State know little about the peer reviewing process.

During these peer review workshops, instructors invite a small group of tutors to their classes to present an interactive workshop about the peer reviewing process. These classes have ranged from a political science class to a metallurgy class. We try to tailor our presentation specifically to meet each class's different needs. Before the class visit, the tutors meet with the instructor to get more information about the class and the types of writing assignments given.

Usually, we present these workshops in two parts. In the first part of the workshop, we introduce students to Kenneth Bruffee's descriptive outline. The descriptive outline helps students understand the difference between what a sentence or paragraph "says" and "does" in the work. We usually use a short piece of writing and have students work in small groups to identify what each sentence does and what it says. This exercise allows students to develop their critical reading skills and to practice using the language needed to communicate effectively about writing.

The next part of the workshop focuses on the evaluative and substantive portions of a review. Here we provide students with some questions to consider when they are reading a paper and evaluating its substance. Finally, students have the opportunity to practice peer reviews with their classmates as peer tutors circulate to answer questions.

As instructors hear more about these workshops, we have been able to serve a greater number of students who we may not see in the Writing Center. ✍

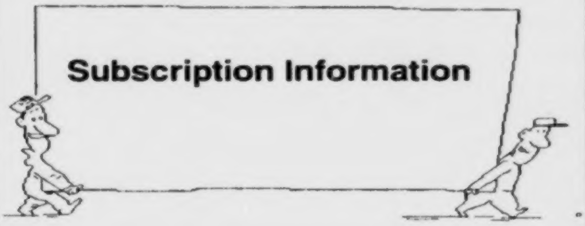
Do you have any good anecdotes about being a peer tutor? Something that really lightened your day when you were tutoring? If so, *The Dangling Modifier* staff is interested in hearing your story. We would like to put together a column of some of the most interesting sessions we've ever had, and we'd like to hear from you. If you have an interesting story, write a paragraph or two and send it to us.

To Tutor or Not to Tutor

By Rick Sides
Former Penn State University Tutor

Here's a poem we found in our "archives" here at Penn State that we hope you'll enjoy.

To tutor or not to tutor, that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of defensive writers,
Or to take arms against a swarm of papers
And by counseling help them. To write—to revise,
No more; and by a revision, to say we end
The heartache and the thousand writer's blocks
That authors are heirs to: 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To write, to revise;
To revise, perchance to fail—ay, there's the rub:
For in that revision of depth what grades may drop,
When we have shuffled off this sloppy construction,
Must give us pause—there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long semester.
For who would bear the whips and scorns of
rhetorical analysis,
Th'addresser's wrong, the proud freshman's
contumely,
The pangs of displaced commas, the budget's decay,
The insolence of instructors, and the spurns
That patient merit of th'unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With bare apathy? Who would drop-ins bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary two hours,
But that the dread of something after the session,
The unoccupied cubicle, from whose three walls
No writer returns unscathed, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather groom those skills we have
Than to fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all.
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of liquid paper,
And enterprises of great pitch and moment
With this regard their currents turn away
And lose the name of action. Soft you now,
The learned Bruffee! Sage, in thy orisons
Be all my flaws remembered.



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Make Checks Payable to the Penn State Writing Center. Tell us the name of your writing center, the address to which your subscription should be sent and your subscription plan.

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paper or an awkwardly worded sentence is not effective. In creative works, however, the criteria are far less rigid; if William Faulkner were to walk into the Writing Center, most tutors would suggest that he restructure his sentences to make them easier to follow. A tutor not familiar with postmodernism or stream of consciousness could easily mistake careful artistic choices for careless writing. However, learning about all possible esthetics is far beyond the scope of a one-semester tutor training class. Even after taking several advanced fiction and poetry writing classes, I feel uncomfortable reacting to someone's creative writing in a peer tutoring situation. As most writers and students of literature know, learning to appreciate different kinds of creative literature can take a lifetime.

Even aside from considerations of tutor qualifications, peer tutoring is an inappropriate forum to discuss creative works. Most creative writing classes are held in a workshop format, which means that an author gets feedback from all members of her class, as well as from the instructor, who presumably provided guidelines for class discussion. In a workshop setting, as opposed to peer tutoring, people are encouraged to evaluate creative works and state critical opinions. They mark freely on one another's papers and make detailed suggestions for improvement. This process allows the writer to weigh several different critiques and heed the ones that adhere most closely to her artistic vision. However, peer tutors are taught not to evaluate the writing they see before them. This neutrality becomes a hindrance when dealing with creative writing.

When a student writer submits a creative work for class review, her implied question to the class is "Do you think this is working on an artistic level?" This is a vital question that peer tutors are neither trained nor allowed to answer. In fairness to the writers with whom we work, tutors at the Writing Center should not tutor creative piecess.

Writer Comments on Our Services

Compiled by Elizabeth Santoro and Tshawna Byerly
Penn State University

At Penn State we give each writer a form that we call an exit evaluation. The form includes the tutor's name but not the writer's. It asks writers to comment honestly on how their session went, what they thought of their tutor, and how they think our service could improve. Of course, sometimes writers are in a hurry and we get answers like "fine" and "yes," but sometimes these exit evaluations can really show us what we're doing right and what we may need to improve. Below are some samples that we've taken from our exit evaluations.

The tutor...

☐ made good points overlooked by myself and reinforced the strong points.
☐ was very personable and helpful.
☐ really took a lot of time discussing my questions.
☐ was helpful and I felt comfortable.
☐ was very constructive in her criticism and incorporated my input into it.
☐ is EXCELLENT!
☐ cleared up all my questions and helped me finish my ideas.

❒ helped me feel confident about my paper.

❒ helped me a lot! I would suggest this to other people in my class.

❒ not only helped me with my grammar but taught me a few things.

❒ showed he was really interested in my concerns and answered my questions to the best of his ability.

❒ has a passion for writing.

❒ was very honest and exact.

❒ helped me focus on problems and things that needed to be changed without telling me what to do—good exchange of ideas!

Why Tutees Keep Coming Back:

❒ She was honest.

❒ I like to hear different people's opinions about my paper.

❒ She was very attuned to my concerns and gave me great suggestions.

❒ I just think the Writing Center is a real good idea to help students (like me especially).

❒ We personalized throughout the session—I'm so glad you're here!

❒ She cleared up most of my problems.

What Tutees Would Like To See:

❒ It would help if she had more knowledge of the literary work I was analyzing.

❒ The time was not sufficient.

❒ Need more time...1/2 hour is not enough!

❒ More tutors should be available so that you don't have to wait so long.

Getting on the Web

By Elizabeth Santoro
Penn State University

All right, it's embarrassing, but I admit it: I used to be scared to death of the Internet. The way my computer-literate friends rattled off web site addresses that started "http://www" as if they were reciting their ABCs made me glance nervously at the nearest exit. I had my e-mail, thank you very much, and that was all the technology I needed in my world. Sandra Bullock, whom I considered to be a fine and sensible person, was out there making a movie about a woman whose entire life was very nearly ruined by "The Net." I was afraid of the Internet the way people of long ago were afraid of falling off the edge of a flat world: I just didn't know the facts about it. As soon as I screwed up my courage and got one of my comupter science major friends to guide and reassure me during my very first voyage "on-line," I discovered that it wasn't scary at all. In fact, it was more like a big playgroundd that had all thie infromation I could possibly want to know on it. "Surely," you say, "you can't mean EVERYTHING," but I do. The complete works of Montaigne which I was writing a report on for my French Literature class? It's there. A copy of Sun Tsu's *The Art of War* to use as research for my Internation Politics paper? No problem.

But why stop at Academia? I could also find biographies on my favorite music artists and where I could get tickets for their latest concerts. There were sites about vacation spots that I could consider for Spring Break, complete with an on-line form to fill out to make reservations. Now whenever I need information on a subject, no matter how obscure, one of the first places I look is on the Internet. So when I found out that our Writing Center here at Penn State was building a web page, I didn't dash for the door, but for the computer screen.

(continued on page 10)

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Making a web page is a lot like writing a paper, something with which, as tutors, we are all intimately acquainted. The first step: understanding the assignment. In order to do this, the first thing I did was look at the types of web pages that other centers across the country already had up and running, so I would know what was possible and what worked well. The University of Maine (http://ume.maine.edu/~wcenter/), Michigan Tech University (http://www.hu.mtu.edu/jdcolman/wc/welcome.html), Purdue University (http://owl.trc.purdue.edu), and the University of Texas (http://www.utexas.edu/depts/uwc/.html/main.html) were just a few of the sites that attracted my attention. The next step was, of course, to consider the audience. For our center that was six basic groups: people who are already peer tutors, people who are interested in becoming peer tutors, students who are interested in learning about and using the services we provide, faculty who want to know who we are and what we do so they can consider recommending our services to their students, people from other writing centers who are interested in knowing how our center works, and subscribers to *The Dangling Modifier*. These six groups were easy to incorporate into one web page, because the information they each wanted was similar. Links on the front page of our site could help them to go directly to the area of information they wanted. Links to other pages, such as the Penn State English Department, other University Learning Centers at Penn State, and writing center pages at other universities, would help visitors to our page to find any information they may not find on our page. Some of our ideas currently include information on who we are, what we do (and don't do), our philosophy, how we are trained, what writers can expect from a session, excerpts from previous issues of *The Dangling Modifier* and even pictures of our center and staff.

Creating a web page is a fun and exciting process, because the Internet is an increasingly important and used resource for everyone, especially students. The purpose of the Internet is not very much different from the purpose of the Writing Center: to help people get the information they need in their daily lives, and even to get some enjoyment out of the process of learning this information. The Penn State Writing Center's page will be going up this coming Spring. So when it's time to boldly go where thousands of information-seekers have gone before, don't be afraid. You'll find what you need, soon including the Penn State Writing Center, on the Internet. I'll see you there. ✍

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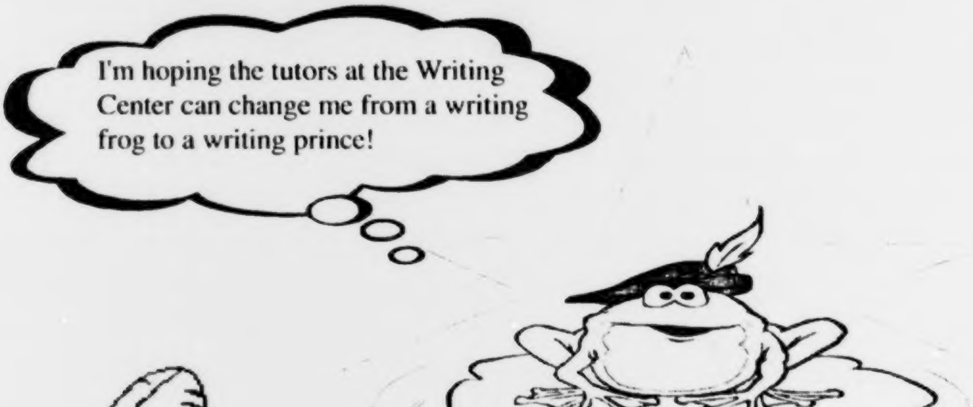
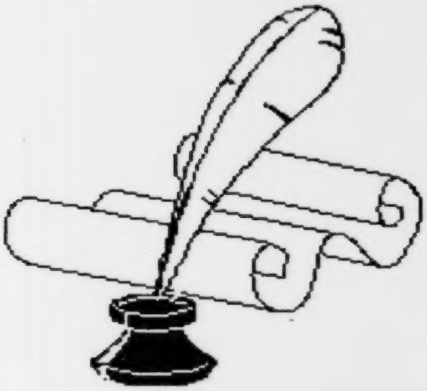
Dangling


I'm hoping the tutors at the Writing Center can change me from a writing frog to a writing prince!



Modifier

THE DANGLING MODIFIER is produced in association with the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing

I simply say "Yes"

By Amanda Burgess

Grand Valley State University

As my second semester at the Writing Center unwinds, I have had plenty of opportunities to tell people about my job. When asked about what I do, I recite the usual spiel about working with students on improving thesis statements and organizing their papers. But it is always the question "Do you like your job?" that makes me pause and think. I mean, not only do we as writing tutors get the chance to be a positive influence on students who may be lacking confidence in their writing ability, but we also gain knowledge about different subjects by reading papers written by students from a variety of disciplines.

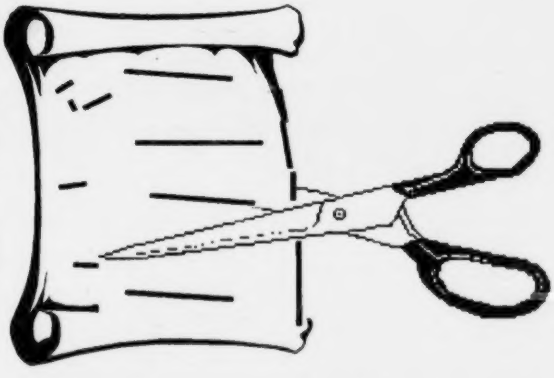
Aside from these benefits, though, comes the possibility of sharing a truly personal moment with someone who visits the Writing Center. The best example I can think of is a student who came to me with a paper about his best friend and their time spent in the Marine Corps. As I was reading his paper (which started out as an account of their experience with military life), it became obvious to me that this was not just a benign narrative about fun times with his best friend. You see, this student's friend was hit by a reckless driver while they were on leave and bled to death while lying in his arms.

Up until then, the student's writing had been expressive and fluid, but at this point in the paper, his words became very choppy and strained. I suggested that he take out a piece of paper, shut his eyes and reflect for a moment, and then rewrite the scene. I watched him squeeze his eyes shut as they welled up with tears, and I saw pain become etched in his features. Slowly he swayed back and forth, and then he began to write with such ferocity that I could barely read what he was writing. The words streamed out of him almost as freely as his tears did, and when he was finished, he slid the paper over to me and I started to read. I felt tears spring up in my own eyes as I read this second account of the tragic death of his best friend. The difference in his prose was striking, and the grief and emotion with which it was written tied my stomach in knots.

After I had finished reading, I wiped my eyes and we looked at one another. I took a deep breath as words ran across my mind. I had planned to tell him how much better this account was and how much his writing had improved. What I ended up saying was, "Thank you. Thank you for sharing with me, a perfect stranger, such a personal moment." Even as a first-year tutor, I realized that experiences like this one come along once in a great while. The feeling of sharing something so special and emotional with a student whom I had never met, and possibly may never see again, is what I wish I could express to people when they ask me if I like my job. Instead, I simply say "Yes." ✍

Cut and Paste...In College?

By Suzana Krstevski
Walsh University



It was my very first tutorial. Before his arrival, I feared the worst: his paper was due in ten minutes, and he wanted me to fix all the problems in it so he could get an *A*. No, worse yet, he didn't even have a topic. Oh, what if he didn't even know the assignment?!?!?! Luckily, the writer walked in and saved me from my torturous and unfounded game of "what if."

"Hi," he said.

I thought, "So far, so good."

"This is my paper. I know I have all the information, but I just don't think it sounds good." With a few probing questions, I learned he meant, "I guess I need help putting it in order."

Ahhh, organization. This was something I could handle.

We started at the beginning by examining his thesis. I explained that a good thesis would organize the paper for him. He was amazed. We worked with his main ideas and put them all together in one sentence. I congratulated him on writing an excellent thesis. He could not believe that was all it took to write a thesis. From there we knew where we were going.

If the writer would have had his paper on disc with him, we could have used the cut and paste feature in Word Perfect to put his paper in order. However, since he did not, we decided to cut and paste literally. The reorganization started to get too complex to draw arrows and refer to other page numbers. So I pulled out the tape and the scissors. He must have thought I was crazy but followed along anyway, probably hoping his time was almost up.

We cut apart his paper, then played with the pieces. I kept referring him back to his thesis. My question, "Does this follow the order you set at the beginning in your thesis?" became a familiar one. When we were satisfied that the organization was coherent, we taped all the pieces together.

I found that by using the actual physical pieces of the paper, he had a better grasp of his ideas. Each part of the paper had its own corresponding physical piece. By relating the thought to something concrete, I think the writer understood the process and was able to internalize what we were doing. He viewed his paper as a puzzle. The thesis was his guide to putting the puzzle together. When he finished taping his eight-foot-long paper together, he smiled triumphantly.

"Wow," I thought, "it worked, and it wasn't so bad after all."

Good Conversation

By Jessica Query
Grand Valley State University

When I began the year, I said that I was interested in tutoring an ESL student. Being a Spanish minor, I felt I could understand some of the difficulties of trying to learn a new language. The ESL student I ended up working with was a graduate student from China. She came to Grand Valley to obtain her master's degree in education.

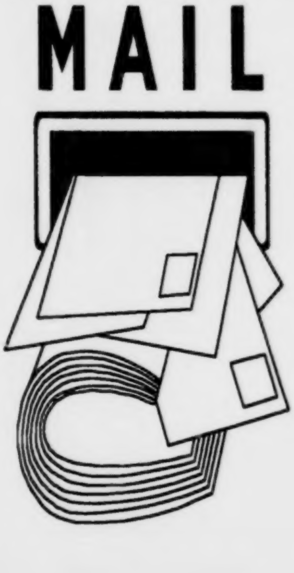
During our sessions together, we spent the majority of the time talking. Jane told me what was going on in her classes, and we went over ideas verbally. We went over drafts of papers, and I helped her with the written portions of her assignments, but she felt talking to me was what helped her the most. I was worried at first about this because I didn't know if I was giving her the help she needed. At the end of the semester, Jane came in and told me that she found out that her grade in her hardest class was an *A*. She said she couldn't have done it without our "talks."

My experience just reinforces the idea that the basis of writing is communication. My job as an ESL tutor was to help Jane become a better writer and a better communicator. Jane had to feel comfortable talking about her ideas before she could write about them. So I guess the point of this little story is to emphasize that it's OK to only loosely focus on writing when working with ESL students. Learning a language can be an extremely frustrating experience, and any method that helps a second language learner to communicate better should be used.

Submission Information:

The Dangling Modifier welcomes submissions of 500 words or fewer and strongly encourages you to submit shorter pieces. Submissions **do not** have to be formal essays....they can be poems, drawings, lists, etc. Editors reserve the right to edit submissions for grammar and length. Please include your address, telephone number, and e-mail address so we can contact you about any stylistic changes or questions.

Submissions can be sent in the following ways:
Mail: The Dangling Modifier, 219 Boucke Building, University Park, PA 16802; e-mail: tlb171@psu.edu; or fax (814) 863-9814.
Any questions? Please e-mail us or call us at (814) 865-1841.



The Importance of Demeanor

By Glenn J. Bergeron II
Nicholls State University

The topic of which I write is probably something already obvious to most writing consultants; however, the power of its results seemed a revelation to me which I feel worthy of writing. As a writing consultant at the Writing Across the Curriculum Lab at Nicholls State University, over the past two years I have been involved in consultations which have stemmed from completely wretched to absolutely exhilarating. Of course, many factors can contribute to the subsequent success or failure of a writing consultation, but I have had a tendency to always question what part of that success or failure might be attributed to my participation. Strangely, or perhaps, naturally, successful consultations occupy a minimal amount of space in my memory, while I often place a great deal of meditation on consultations gone awry. Because volumes can be written on the various aspects of peer writing consultations (and have been already), I will relate one aspect which I have subconsciously been putting into practice without fully realizing the impact of its assertion until a recent consultation where it seemed rather revelatory. I write of maintaining a pleasant demeanor.

The role of demeanor in a writing consultation is a double one in that both the consultant's demeanor and the student's demeanor can bear fruit affecting the outcome of the meeting. Yes, students can have bad days, and because writing consultants are students too, we are not exempt from an occasional bad day ourselves. Also, I adhere to the philosophy that a student's paper is the ultimate responsibility of that student. However, as a writing consultant, I am constantly aware of the responsibility which I have accepted to uphold to students seeking assistance. I do not insinuate that this elevates the consultant to a higher position of authority over the student, but I do mean to suggest that a writing consultant must set aside any outside matters which may disagreeably affect the progress of the consultation. In short, a writing consultant must maintain a pleasant demeanor while on duty.

For example, a student may enter the writing center for a consultation with you on an essay on which he has scored poorly. To top it off, this student has arrived under less than favorable circumstances, i.e., he dropped his Egg McMuffin in his lap on the drive to school, arrived late to his first class due to difficulty in finding a parking space, and was caught off guard by a pop quiz for which he was unprepared. Of course, all these circumstances are completely beyond your control and by no means are they your fault. Nonetheless, the student is agitated and the consultation is in jeopardy before it even begins. What should you do? Is it your responsibility to cheer this student up? Well, in a way, yes. In no manner are you obligated to take blame or, possibly, abuse for any unfortunate mishaps which may have occurred prior to his arrival, but a sincere "I'm sorry to hear that" is within reason. And it often

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works wonders. I state this opinion because, regardless of the student's demeanor, as a consultant, you should see your way through any unpleasantness with one goal in mind: a successful consultation. And aside from good writing and listening skills, a pleasant demeanor is probably the most effective, though not always the easiest, way of focusing the student on what he had initially come for.

Similarly, you, the writing consultant might be experiencing a rather questionable day yourself. Should you convey this to the student with whom you are consulting, the student will almost always be affected by this tension. Your indifference, agitation, or lack of focus is almost sure to hamper the productivity of your time together. Remember that an assistance-seeking student's time is as valuable as yours. Besides, by not assisting a student effectively due to an unpleasant demeanor, you can be legitimately accused of neglecting your responsibilities to the student, the writing center, and yourself as a consultant.

Demeanor can be a decisive factor in the outcome of a writing consultation. I have only attempted to introduce its importance; yet it's easier to recognize than apply. Yes, not all students will enter a writing center full of eagerness and mirth. However, I believe a writing consultant bears the heavy burden of maintaining a pleasant demeanor because he or she has accepted the role of one who offers assistance and is more thoroughly familiar with the writing consultation process. ✍

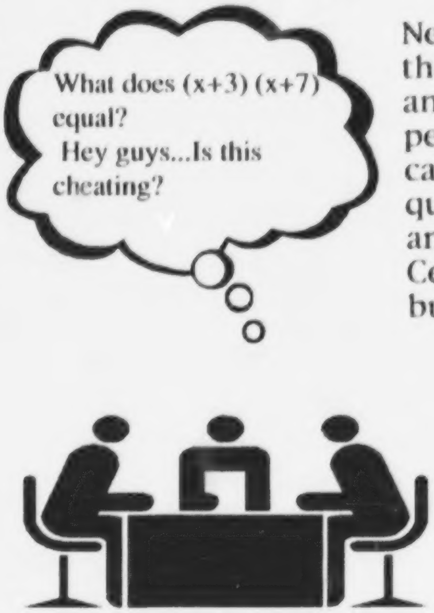
More Funnies to Tickle Your Humor

Here are a few more bloopers that someone sent the editor off the internet; we believe they were taken from student papers at some point or another.

☐Columbus was a great navigator who cursed about the Atlantic.
☐Many of the Indian heroes were killed, which proved very fatal to them.
☐The government of England is a limited mockery.
☐Abraham Lincoln wrote the Gettysburg Adress while traveling from Washington to Gettysburg on the back of an envelope.
☐Henry VIII had an abbess on his knee, which made walking difficult.
☐*The Scarlet Letter* griped me intensely.
☐Shakespeare wrote tragedies, commedies, and errors.
☐Milton wrote "Paradise Lost"; then his wife died and he wrote "Paradise Regained."
☐Magna Charta said that the King was not to order taxis without the consent of Parliment.
☐They gave William IV a lovely funeral. It took six men to carry the beer.
☐Staying married to one woman is known as monotany.
☐A polygon is a man who has many wives.
☐Acrimony is what a man gives his divorced wife.
☐A Senator is half horse and half man.
☐An illiterate child is one whose parents are not married.
☐In the middle of the nineteenth century, all morons moved to Utah.
☐Herrings go about the sea in shawls.
☐Socrates died from an overdose of wedlock.
☐Three shots rang out. Two of the servants fell dead, the other went through his hat.
☐The witness was warned not to purge himself.

Confessions of a High School Cheater

By Amiena Mahsoob
Penn State University


What does (x+3) (x+7) equal?
Hey guys...Is this cheating?

I will never forget my tenth grade algebra teacher. Ms. E. not only claimed to be a female mud-wrestler, but also gave extra credit to students who correctly guessed her hair color of the week and one time asked me to attend a "new age" conference with her. She left quite an impression on all of us, not only personally, but also academically. You see, when we asked her questions about algebra or things other than her hot dates, she evaded our questions by stating, "Well, maybe if you studied, you would know." She left us with the impression that asking questions implied academic impotence, so we responded with our primitive form of collaborative learning: blatant "cheating." We "illegally" discussed how we solved problems, came to a consensus, and handed in the work as thoroughly our own.

When I entered college, I was amazed to find that not only was what I considered to be blatant cheating running rampant in the school, but the University actually paid certain students to work in centers throughout the campus in order to instigate it. These "learning centers" aided students in anything from math to writing and actually provided it as a free service. Needless to say, I frequented the Math Center religiously and learned not only how to perform the desired tasks in calculus, but also how to ask questions, answer questions, and help other students in the Center when the tutors were busy. Overall, I met some fun people and enjoyed my time studying for one of the most difficult classes in my college career. Oddly enough, I did the same thing in the Math Center as I did in tenth grade: I explored a bit of academia with fellow students. I must admit, I felt a twinge of inspiration. So I inquired about the other Centers on campus, searching for something more up my alley, and found the Writing Center.

Today, I'm training to become a writing tutor. Surprisingly, I find that students come to the Writing Center with the same types of questions that I asked next door at the Math Center. Writers need assignments and questions clarified, help with their logic and reassurance when they are on task. Not only are these writers trying to learn, they exemplify the spirit of a true student or laborer in today's society: they do not isolate themselves under the guise of hard work, but rather gather together to share a wealth of common knowledge.

The Director's Chair

By Mary Dossin, Writing Center Director
Plattsburgh State University of New York

I've witnessed some inauspicious beginnings. Jeannine sat in the back row of my tutor-training class and shielded her eyes with her hand for much of the period. Dave missed class half the time and never handed in assignments. Erin always swept in late in a tumble of books, skirt, and hair, disrupting us while she settled into her seat. I've learned to have faith.

Jeannine was recently told that an essay she wrote in the class (and later presented at the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing and published in the Writing Lab Newsletter) will be included in a book on training writing tutors by Toni-Lee Capposela. Dave presented at the NCPTW one year too, and his topic was a telling one: "From Goof-Off to Dynamic Tutor." When he worked as a tutor, he energized the center with his presence: humorous and easy-going while purposeful and perceptive. Erin is now planning her second presentation at the NCPTW and has also spoken at regional and local conferences. She has gained particular expertise working with students for whom English is a second language, and she eagerly shares her knowledge with others.

The recent National Writing Centers Conference in Utah reaffirmed my belief that ours is a profession that offers unbeatable opportunities for professional and personal growth. The peer tutors whose presentations I attended there were poised and knowledgeable. In their training and their work, tutors learn about writing and talking about writing, of course, but they also build less obvious but crucial skills as they learn to develop productive working relationships, use body language effectively, initiate communication with new people, work with people they don't like, deal directly and unemotionally with problems, take initiative rather than waiting to be told what to do, and use authority effectively. These are good things to know how to do.

None of these accomplishments and skills would be possible, however, without the qualities of curiosity and energy—the *sine qua non* for writing tutors. Awakening and directing these powerful forces begins in the tutor training course, where all of us do the things that professionals do: read, write, observe, practice, and discuss in our field. Curiosity prompts honest questions as tutors work with writers, and it also prompts tutors to ask questions about their tutoring encounters and to energetically pursue answers.

Questions that my tutors need to

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answer for themselves are often questions other people are asking too, and I am pleased that so many Plattsburgh tutors have been able to share their knowledge in all of the wider contexts named above—and, of course, in this publication also. I've been at this long enough that I hear from former tutors who are now teachers, counselors, Ph.D.s, and directors of their own writing centers—among many other interesting pursuits. They are unanimous in praising the background and skills that they gained from their tutoring experience. (The number one skill they acclaim is attentive listening.) Watching all this happen makes mine the best job in the world! ✍

What's going on in your Writing Center? I'll bet there's something interesting happening. Tell us about it....We want to know! Are you starting to take on new responsibilities? Are there any new and exciting changes happening within your Center? Are there any current controversies in your Center? Or did you just have a really good session the other day? Tell us about any or all of these topics.

Everything I Could Have Hoped to Learn About Writing, I Learned by Becoming a GVSU Writing Tutor...

By Shauna Swantek
Grand Valley State University

Since this will be my final contribution to the (Grand Valley) center newsletter, which I have yet to learn how to pronounce or spell, I want to share a little about my tutoring experiences with hopes that my words may help in recruiting new tutors. In all honesty, my only regret about becoming a writing tutor at Grand Valley State University is that I did not do it sooner. I have learned more about writing by being a writing tutor for two semesters than I have in all my years of being a writer and a reader. Just as I believe everyone should spend a day teaching in a public school, I believe everyone should spend a day as a writing tutor. Working with varied levels of writers on various types of writing has helped me to gain a greater respect for the power of words and an understanding of writers from many backgrounds. This continues to reinforce my belief that writing is one of the most powerful talents anyone in any field can have.

As a writing tutor, I have worked with freshman writers, ESL students, and upperclassmen from various disciplines. I have helped decipher professors' assignments, organize oral speeches from papers, calm English 150 (first year comp) students preparing to turn in portfolios, read many résumés and cover letters, and keep frustrated English 098 (pre-college comp) students writing for an entire 50 minute meeting. I have also learned about international espionage in the families of GVSU students, cried while reading English 150 papers, watched love blossom in a 098 group, and learned to pronounce many foreign words and medical terms.

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I was not only able to convince a 098 group on the verge of anarchy to talk to their professor, but I helped them get the things they wanted to say written in words so they had something in front of them when they went to talk to her. There is something exhilarating about helping another person communicate an idea clearly, and tutees feel that as much as their tutors. A writing tutor does not proofread; a writing tutor draws out the thoughts of each writer and helps each writer organize those ideas into written words.

I am finishing my schooling at Grand Valley and will soon be a full-fledged secondary English teacher. My experiences as a writing tutor have helped me to gain a better feel for how prepared college students are as writers. I now have a better understanding of where my students need to be when they enter a university and hopefully have a bigger bag of "tricks" to use to get them to that point. Most of all, I know now that good writing is about organization and clarity of genuine thoughts. The word "genuine" is the key; to be a good writer, one must care about what one is writing. Sometimes the job of a good writing consultant boils down to simply helping a writer find an angle of their topic that they care about. I am certain that I have learned more about the levels and types of writing and writers from my five hours tutoring a week than in any of my methods courses or even in my interaction with students in the classroom. ✍

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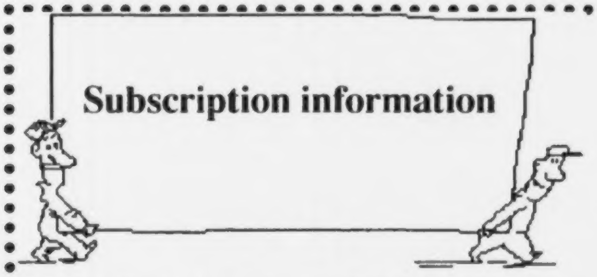

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Volume 4, Number 2 A National Newsletter by and for Peer Tutors in Writing Spring 1998

The Dangling Modifier

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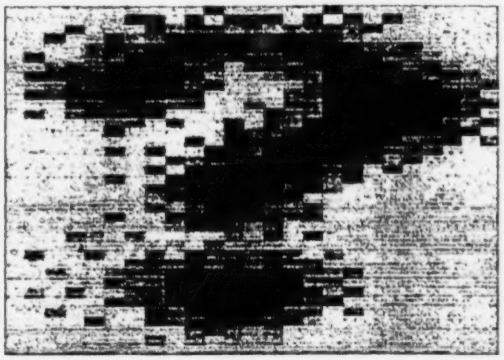
The Dangling Modifier is produced in association with the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing

How Did *He* Get in Here?

By Rich Sonnenberg

University of Cincinnatti



"Who is this guy, Rich? He didn't notice this? He's a tutor? He's an idiot!"

When I first started as a peer tutor, I felt that I had many inadequacies. First of all, I'm not an English major. In fact, I am still undecided as to my major. I was also never confident with my own writing abilities. It took me forever just to write a one-page paper. I constantly suffered from writer's block and would freak out the night before a paper was due. I never would have guessed that my teacher would ask me to be a peer tutor.

My first tutoring experience was very intimidating. Before opening the lab, one of my professors, Ms. Wallace, offered to assist me with my first tutee. She said I could just observe and jump in anytime I felt I had something to say. A few minutes after the door was opened, Sarah came into the lab asking for help with a revision. We introduced ourselves, sat down, and I asked her to read aloud so that both of us could work together. As soon as Sarah started reading, my mind began to wander. *What am I looking for? What is her thesis? Did I miss it? As soon as Sarah stops reading I know Ms. Wallace is going to ask me for my thoughts. I'd better have something to say.* Then I realized I wasn't paying any attention and wasn't going to have anything to say. I began to question my attention span. How can I be a good tutor if I can't pay attention to a simple two-page essay?

I know that I am not the only person to have entered into tutoring with fears of inadequacy. After our first class, I spoke with another student who expressed similar feelings. She too thought that she would be the lone tutor who was not an English major. She also expressed doubts about her own writing ability. This conversation prompted the first little boost in my confidence. It made me realize that I wasn't alone. It also made me realize that we are peer tutors, suggesting that the only thing that separates us from the tutees is a little experience. We must realize that more likely than not, when we first start something new, such as tutoring, we are not going to be at our best. It is only after trial and error that we learn what it takes to be a good tutor. We must also realize that our teachers know this. They don't expect instant greatness. They have dealt with many tutors' fears and many have had these same fears themselves. All of these fears can be cured with experience. Students come to the lab because they need help, and every little bit counts. All we are really doing is just sharing the knowledge that we learned from being in their shoes. ✍

From the Other Side

By Dawn Hillberg
Michigan State University

Working with clients who speak English as a second language (ESL) in our writing center is proving to be very challenging for me. Language barriers, shifting roles between consultant and client, and unvoiced expectations may contribute to the frustration I experience in this consulting. However, I recently gained a new understanding of the ESL perspective. While working with my French tutor, I had the opportunity to experience a situation similar to our consulting sessions, but from the viewpoint of the client. This experience was very valuable because in the process of workshopping my paper, I experienced many frustrations that our ESL clients must experience when they bring their work to the writing center.

The first problem that arose in our session was deciding the language in which to conduct the session. Although this is not an issue in our writing consultations, it gave me some insight into the intimidation that clients may feel when speaking English with native speakers. I discovered in this session that it was difficult for me to ask the "right" questions, or rather, difficult to formulate language to convey the exact meaning of my question. This intimidation made me not want to ask questions; I wanted to sit back passively and listen to my tutor, rather than take a very active role in revising my paper. Our ESL clients at the writing center may feel this same intimidation because of their perception of consultants as "experts," simply because we are native English speakers. This may be why many of them tend to remain silent during consulting sessions.

The most interesting part, for me, was to see my own attitudes and expectations change during the session. Originally, I had gone into this session intending to treat it like those we have in the writing center. I wanted to look at "big picture issues," content, and organization. Although I knew grammar would be a large concern, I wanted to look for patterns of errors in my grammar, figure out why I was making these mistakes, and determine how I could change them for next time.

What I ended up doing, however, was a different story. I became caught up in the fact that I had a native speaker at my disposal and all my questions became grammar focused. I began to concentrate my energy on making this particular paper perfect, rather than gaining more knowledge about how the language works and working to become a better writer.

Then I began to notice that many of the attitudes I had were similar to those of ESL clients with whom I have consulted and the attitudes that frustrate me the most. I was letting the tutor take charge of the session, and I was writing down her ideas word for word. I started to wonder what

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I'd really be gaining from this. I realized that we could make this particular paper error-free from a native speaker's point of view, but how would that make me a better writer? What was I learning from this session that I could use the next time I sat down to write in French? These realizations were valuable because they provoked me to turn the session around and get back to the "larger issues" on which I had originally intended to concentrate.

I'm really glad I was able to experience the flip side of these sessions. As a writing consultant, I think I needed to be reminded of the struggles and frustrations of all clients, but especially ESL writers. This session made me realize that it would be beneficial to talk to the ESL writer first before working on the paper, to find out more about her or his writing processes and frustrations. If my tutor had taken time to talk with me about these issues during our consultation, not only would I have felt less intimidated, but I would have gained better facility with the language. The consultation not only would have improved this one paper, but would have helped me to become a better writer in a foreign language. ✍

Submission Information:

The Dangling Modifier welcomes submissions of 500 words or fewer and strongly encourages you to submit shorter pieces. Submissions do not have to be formal essays...they can be poems, drawings, lists, stories, etc. Editors reserve the right to edit submissions for grammar and length. Please include your address, telephone number, and e-mail address so we can contact you about any stylistic changes or questions.

Submissions can be sent in the following ways: Mail: The Dangling Modifier, 219 Boucke Building, University Park, PA 16802; e-mail: jxh265@psu.edu; or fax: (814) 863-9814.

Any questions? Please e-mail us or call us at (814)865-1841.

Ride the Bus; Skin the Cat; Sabotage the Ice Cream Truck: A Consideration of External Factors in the Writing Process

By Will Toedtman
University of Cincinnatti

My friend Joe has an unconventional habit. Every six months or so, for a couple of weeks he lives on a Greyhound bus in transit, filling notebooks with material for his novel. He once told me he can't write anywhere else. He's inspired by the motion of the bus, the constant changing of environment, and all the other nuances of the ride. They have become instrumental factors in his writing process. While Joe may be eccentric, maybe even a little bent, he seems to have found something worthwhile in the bending. His quixotic lifestyle is a tribute to the idea that the productivity of one's writing can be enhanced given the right conditions.

However, the optimal conditions for facile writing tend to be widely varied andn rather personal. I must concede that neither I nor probably anyone I've encountered so far in the writing lab has any immediate intentions of writing a novel, not to mention uprooting oneself every six months in order to do so. But it is also important to note that none of us has led the life of Joe. So before you sink your next paycheck into a bus ticket in order to write that term paper, consider the following.

Stimulated by a bustling social climate or perhaps a bohemian atmosphere, some people feel they can only write in cafes. Others take solace in the library; just being in an environment with many other people who are all intent on their studies (or at least appear to be) can bolster the initiative to write. Still other writers are most comfortable dictating their work into a tape recorder, perhaps leaving any actual writing or typing entirely to someone else. For those inspired by nature, an outdoor setting such as a park or backyard might best invoke the muse. The impetus could really come from anything: your favorite sweater, a cappuccino, a fountain pen, halogen lamplight.

I tend to do my best writing at home when I'm in seclusion and silence—two conditions which are rarely, if ever, absolute. Whenever I sit down to work, my cat Azalea will leap onto

(continued on page 6)

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my writing surface and demand affection by sprawling herself all over my materials. If I shut her out of the room, she'll meow and croon at the door until I let her in. Another frequent adversity is an ice cream truck that circuits my neighborhood. Always blaring a stiff, electronic arrangement of the first few lines of Joplin's *Entertainer,* this truck can be heard five blocks away. Then there's the agony of countless refrains growing louder and louder as the truck approaches my street.

Sometimes it's a lost cause. But in general, if I do what I can to minimize distractions and attain some sense of privacy, I'm likely better prepared and more willing to write. I try to do most of my writing in mid-afternoon or late at night. The phone doesn't ring much then, and I am less apt to be bothered by the sounds of traffic, the thundering of car stereos, or other noises. I have a boxed window fan that creates a pleasant din of white noise. The steady hum of the fan belt and blades whirling away drowns out the distraction of lesser noises such as a TV in another room or a cat crooning at the door. It's like the year's first snowfall on a lawn cluttered with leaves. A new level of silence is superimposed with fewer imperfections.

As students, we have the task of writing imposed on us routinely. Furthermore, it's difficult—even for the best writers. Unfortunately, since we have slightly different motivations than Joe, the intermittent, rambling novelist, writing under optimal conditions may not always be feasible. But, so much as it is an integral part of our lives, we can do well to accommodate our writing by determining the environment in which it will flourish and making use of it whenever possible. Whatever your inclination may be (provided it's nonviolent), honor it. It is bound to ease the burden and, perhaps, exact the joy of writing. ✍

Safety First

By Michael E. Marcotte
University of Cincinnati

A situation arose not long ago that gave me some real food for thought. While I was working in our English tutor lab, a young man walked in for help with a writing assignment. He immediately approached the more experienced tutor I am fortunate enough to be paired with. The student smiled, leaned across the table, and asked her if her name was Amy. She replied no and asked if I could take care of him. Being a rookie, I assumed she was simply trying to steer some experience and practice my way. I said sure and sat down with the student while my coworker went into our supervisor's office and closed the door behind her. After the student had gone, the other tutor and my supervisor gave me the lowdown on the student I just assisted. During a previous quarter, he had come in for help while my current coworker was manning the lab. She is a naturally open and friendly person and made small talk with him before tackling his paper. Well, apparently this student took her friendliness as a come-on and started asking her sexual habits and preferences, which made her extremely uncomfortable. The guy gave her the creeps.

My supervisor also told me

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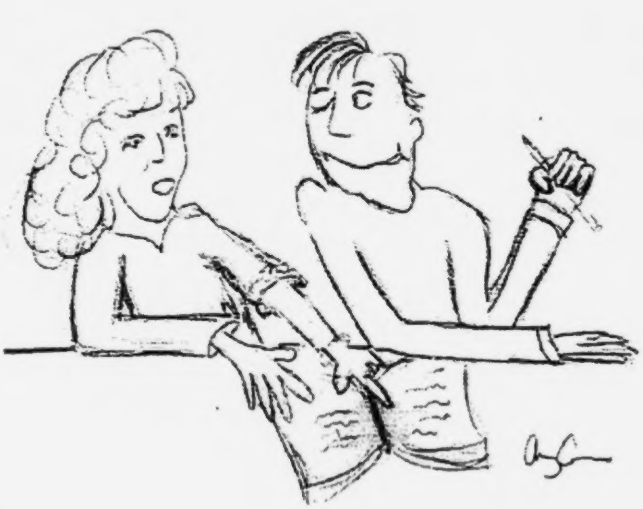
that within the past year another tutor had actually been stalked by one of her tutees. Now, I am 6'2" and tip the scales at 225 pounds, so I don't think it is quite as likely that I will have to deal with situations such as the aforementioned, but it offends me that tutors have to worry about this kind of thing at all. Nevertheless, the whole episode started me thinking about the safety and security aspects of the tutor/tutee relationship. Upon consideration, the issue spawned far more questions than answers. I hope that simply raising the issue is enough. The question of what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behavior immediately gave birth to another: *Is* there a clear line between these behaviors? There *is* a line, but it varies according to the individual tutor. What is offensive to one may not even raise the eyebrow of another. The quick and easy rule is that if a tutee's behavior and/or language makes a tutor uncomfortable, then the tutor has the right to either refer the student to another tutor or the lab supervisor, or to diplomatically let the student know that their behavior is inappropriate. Our lab highly stresses the importance of professional behavior from our tutors, and we reserve the right in turn to be treated in a professional manner by our tutees.



We try to make our "clients" feel comfortable and at ease, but apparently there is such a thing as being too familiar. It is incumbent upon the administrators and teachers in charge of the labs to be aware of these concerns and to make their tutors aware as well. As abhorrent as I find the prospect of the necessity of discussing this matter, it must be done. We all want our tutees to feel comfortable, but it must not be at the expense of our own safety. I welcome responses. I would very much like to know how you, my peers, feel about this subject and to know how administrators and tutors elsewhere have dealt with situations of sexual harassment, stalking, and other related concerns. ✍

Editor's Note:
We are really interested in getting feedback on this situation. Recently here at Penn State University, one of our tutors was approached by a writer who asked her to pose nude for some pictures. What can we do about these kinds of situations? How do we keep each other safe? Our writing center responded in part by posting the number for the local walk service that students can call to request an escort home after dark.

Director's Chair

By Jon Olson, Writing Center Director
Pennsylvania State University

Writing Center director reflects on writers' enthusiasm....

Jimmy's Killer Soccer Ball

[Thanks to the Peer Tutoring in Writing students of Penn State's University Park campus for letting me write their assignments along with them, to Moira Dempsey for helping me remember the writers in this story, and to Cheryl Glenn for helping me change the writers' names.]

Jimmy Riley meant business as he bent over a story he'd written about a killer soccer ball that bit legs. He gripped a pencil in one hand and an eraser in the other. He had come to the University Writing Center with twenty-two other third-graders, his teacher, and a few parents, and now a tutor was listening to him read his story and was asking him questions. When he'd been writing the story back in his classroom and at home, Jimmy had paid more attention to drawing the ball's flesh-tearing teeth than he'd paid to the narrative plot of this soccer ball on a rampage. Now as he answered the tutor's questions, he could see he had some gaps to fill if his story was going to make sense to this fellow writer who really seemed interested in the story. So Jimmy shoved a keyboard aside to give himself more room to write with his dull pencil, and he got busy.

As Jimmy concentrated, he zoned out the other writers' voices around him. He didn't notice his classmate Jeannie Schweinfurth talking. She'd written an essay on the importance of putting out a fire when on a camping trip.

Susie Ferran had written about a six-year-old girl who is ignored because of her younger sister. Susie's mom had just had a baby.

Darrin Johnson had written about a bat named Flutter. His story was full of bat facts: bats eat three hundred mosquitoes a night; they catch mosquitoes with their tails.

David Bowles wrote about the attack of the Slime Monster.

Bobby Cayton had lost the copy of his story about a dragon, but he had it in his head, and he was discussing it with his tutor.

Paula Capell's personal essay was about one of her fears. She began, "When I went into PE that morning, my worst enemy was standing there. The Balance Beam!"

Jamie Barlowe wrote a story called "Bump." Its first paragraph went like this:

> One gloomy old fall day, we moved to a spooky old town called Pioneer Village. My mom described it as a peaceful place where there were tons of butterflies and robins. But all I saw was a bunch of sad people and pitbulls and there was noise everywhere. There were one or two robins but that was it. My mom said the rest will come in the spring, I'm certain. "Yeah right Mom," I whispered to myself.

Fred Wellman was Jamie's tutor that day. Fred was eighty years old and had retired twelve years earlier after a fifty-year career in journalism. When he retired, he'd been an

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executive of a cable news network. He used to say he'd been so good at firing people that they wouldn't know their throat had been cut until they tried to turn their head to leave the room. When Fred filled out a report form on Jamie, he wrote, "Story telling skill is far superior to that of other nine-year-olds. The story contained excellent setting descriptions, suspense, emotions such as fear and anxiety, and a blessed happy ending. Spelling needs work but will improve with age—like a favorite doll." Jamie read her report out loud to her beaming mother, then ran to join her fellow writers as they huddled to compare what tutors had written on their slips.

As the third-graders gathered in the hallway to discuss with their teacher what had happened, they all wanted to talk at once; meanwhile, back in the Writing Center's conference room, the tutors were doing the same thing, talking excitedly. But as discussion focused the energy in the room, one question emerged: what caused the difference between, on the one hand, those confident, enthusiastic third-grade writers who liked writing and, on the other hand, the often apologetic, fearful university writers with whom the tutors so often worked?

Looking out the window, the tutors could see the third-graders lining up for their bus. As Jimmy Riley waited in the rain for his turn to get on, he hunched with pencil in hand over a damp, smudged story he held to his knee, revising.

National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing:

This year the conference will take place in Plattsburgh, New York. The conference hosts are Mary Dossin and the peer tutors at Plattsburgh State University of New York.

Theme: Writers as Readers, Readers as Writers

Keynote: Whatever Became of...? The keynote will concentrate on the lives of former peer tutors.

Date: November 6-8, 1998

The editor and staff of *The Dangling Modifier* encourage you to respond to any articles that you find particularly interesting or controversial. We want to hear YOUR opinion! You can respond in a brief letter or write an entire article expressing your thoughts and feelings. Please make this newsletter your own by taking the time to let us know what you think.

Doubles: Involving More than One Client in a Session

By Justin Felix, Susan Gunn, Chris Roman, and Gerry Winter
Kent State University

No more waiting in line!
We all work together!

The Kent State University Writing Center routinely schedules sessions for students from Introduction to College English (KSU's basic writing course) to work in pairs. Our approach to double sessions (affectionately nicknamed doubles by our peer writing assistants) is theoretically grounded in whole language. A double session employs all four language arts: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. A client who comes to the Writing Center is given the opportunity to read her writing to an audience consisting of another client and a peer writing assistant (PWA). This client hears and evaluates the comments she receives from the others and then, as the focus shifts from her to the other client, assumes the role of the responsible listener and critic. In these sessions, there is no idle or waiting time; the client is always either reading, actively listening, commenting, or writing.

Because whole language theory assumes the social nature of language use, it serves to encourage collaborative work among both participants in a double session. Collaboration between the two clients and the PWA focuses more upon the writer than the paper itself. The PWA's task is not to tell clients what to write but to provide a safe, comfortable atmosphere where clients learn to be writers. The PWA models good group work strategies in the double session, leading to more effective peer editing in the classroom. The basic writing instructor becomes, in a sense, a fourth invisible interlocutor as the clients work together to interpret their writing assignments and write papers that meet their teachers' requirements. Our 45-minute sessions allow time for each client to read her paper to the group, respond to the writing of the other, and apply what she has learned to the process of revision. As clients begin revising, the PWA is nearby for assistance with the new material.

Doubles empower our clients because the balance of power is in their favor; they outnumber PWAs two-to-one in sessions. Clients, in addition, maintain control of their own writing at all times. By working with peers and talking about problems they share in common, our clients often collaborate on solutions and find comfort in the knowledge that they are not alone in their struggles with writing. Basic writers actually teach each other, while the PWA guides and facilitates.

The double session does present challenges which cannot be overlooked but can be overcome. Some clients are initially reluctant to share their writing with others. This reluctance provides an opportunity to educate clients regarding the public nature of academic writing and to cultivate the development of audience awareness. Clients in sessions often have differing levels of ability and experience with writing, but this can be turned to an advantage by a skilled PWA who encourages the stronger student to model for the weaker one.

Well-trained PWAs are crucial to the successful management of the double session.

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During their initial training, PWAs observe sessions, followed by modeling and role playing, as demonstrated in our presentation at the NCPTW last October. Weekly staff meetings provide continuing education in theory and a forum for airing problems, concerns, and successes.

All basic writing students are required to visit the Writing Center at least five times during the semester. To make prospective clients feel at ease, a pair of PWAs visit each basic writing course early in the semester to introduce the Writing Center. They provide information on how to schedule appointments and model a session to give students an idea of what to expect when they come in. The basic writing faculty cooperate by encouraging their students to team up and schedule their sessions in pairs. The director constantly communicates with faculty to ensure that assistants are working in harmony with classroom efforts and that results are meeting, if not exceeding, instructors' expectations. Collaborative learning, in short, is not the domain of our clients alone; it extends to the PWAs and faculty as we continually work together to enable our clients to gain confidence in their ability to actively write, read, speak, and listen. The fact that doubles allow us to accommodate more clients than space and staff limitations would ordinarily allow under a single-session arrangement is an added bonus. ✍

Writing Center Profile in Brief: Berea College

Director: Libby Jones

Number of Consultants: Approximately fifteen undergraduates from all different majors. The school has around 1500 students, and the tutors at Berea do approximately 1200 sessions per year.

Philosophy: They are a center fostering effective written and oral communication and learning, serving the campus community. Their approaches to learning are collaborative, respectful, strategy-based (focused on longterm learning), integrative (of communication modes/skill), need-based, and active.

Set-up: They offer both appointments and drop-in sessions (although they urge appointments). Sessions are scheduled for an hour.

Staff Communication: The Berea consultants have a weekly staff meeting, a message board, a weekly announcement sheet, and a listserv. Consultants also write reflections in their time logs, which are periodically read by senior staff members who respond to the logs. Senior student staff meet an extra hour a week to plan and solve problems.

Client feedback: At the end of each session, consultants ask clients to complete an anonymous evaluation. The evaluations are summarized and posted each month for the whole staff.

Workshops: They lead workshops on specific communication modes and assignments and another series for undergrad teaching assistants on strategies for helping with written and oral communication.

Technology: They have computers available for consultant/client use, but they do not do much computer or internet consulting. They are also in the process of making a web page.

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The Dangling Modifier

Volume 6, Number 1 A National Newsletter by and for Peer Tutors in Writing Spring 1999

In This Issue...

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- *Resume Boosters for Tutors*
- *Computers in the Writing Center*
- *You're an ENGLISH major?!*
- *1999 NCPTW*
- *Tutors as Teachers*
- *International Ideas*

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Culture Shock: From Tutor to Director, Center to Lab

Cynthia K. Marshall
Director—Miami University, Middletown Campus

During my arduous journey through college and graduate school, I worked at Wright State University's Writing Center, where I peer tutored for five years. I was part of a fifty-person tutoring staff. We worked with students of all academic levels, from pre-college to graduate, and most had scheduled appointments. During my time there, I assumed that I had gleaned the finer points of Writing Center work. When I graduated, I became Acting Reading/Writing Specialist at Miami University's Middletown, Ohio campus. In this position, I oversee the Reading/Writing Lab. During my transitional period, I experienced culture shock. Students here at MU usually work on computers rather than engage in face-to-face discussions with tutors. The staff includes six peer tutors and myself. Only one tutor works per shift, and all clients are walk-ins.

> *"When I arrived at Miami University, most shockingly, I was in charge!"*

When I arrived at MU, most shockingly, I was in charge! I was faced with record keeping, covering for no-show tutors, checking timesheets, training tutors, and representing the Lab to the University community, all while trying to innovate and improve the Lab. The times when, as a tutor, (page 2)

Tutoring Creative Writing

Eliza Young
Tutor—Pennsylvania State University

No one would argue that every cover letter is the same or that every topic proposal can be approached in the same manner. Still, for most tutors, a certain level of comfort exists with these types of writing since most of us have had similar assignments. What concerns many veteran tutors is the **unknown**. What constitutes the unknown? The **creative assignment**.

Many confident tutors panic at the sight of a piece of fiction or a creative narrative. Having never written pieces of this sort, they feel that they lack the proper tools to help the writer. Yet tutors must realize that they don't have to be experts in order to do a good job.

Above all else, a tutor must be willing to ask questions. That is, the tutor should feel free to ask the author about certain aspects of the story: why does a certain character speak with an accent? Why the excessive amount of swearing? What does the ending mean to the author?

Just to be safe, it is also a good idea to know the important components of fiction writing. Here are some questions for tutors to consider:

- Do you understand the **plot**? Don't feel badly if the story leaves you confused. Ask the writer to explain the plot and theme. This will help not only you, but also the (page 3)

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The Power of the Computer with Writing Students: Looking Ahead to the Millennium

Michael Anzelone
Professor and Writing Center Assistant—Nassau Community College

I am pleased to report that I have been able to convey the value of a good word processing program, Word '97, to many of the students at the NCC Writing Center. Most of the students I have worked with thus far have no computer at home, and many have limited knowledge of the power of this writing tool. I have helped these students to learn the basics of the word processing program and to improve their writing for a variety of subjects. These students have learned to create a writing file, to save files, to open and close files, and to work with Word '97 in ways that benefit them in our tutoring sessions and beyond.

Encountering word processing for the first time, students marvel at the ease of the "spell check" and "thesaurus" tools that correct careless errors and give them word choice options. Word processing gives them a powerful way to cope with their limitations in writing. It is a joy for me to watch these often meek, fragile, and frustrated students become empowered by the use of these programs. These types of computer-assisted aids are only the very tip of the iceberg. Many other powerful and complicated programs available today will further enable students to improve their writing. At NCC, many English faculty members use interactive programs like "Daedalus," which allows for chats and e-mails. However, as a start, I feel that my work in the NCC Writing Center will have far-reaching consequences and positive results. Many students have mentioned that they plan to look into purchasing computers; others tell me that they plan to make use of the computers on campus.

I believe that I have helped some of these students to overcome their computer phobias. The next step is to have these same students master not only the basic skills of word processing programs, but also to have them understand how the writers of today employ computer technology. I use computers in the Writing Center as well as in my introductory composition classes to familiarize students with the Internet as a research tool. Additionally, I log on to the NCC Library to introduce the research capabilities of this system, and many students gain the confidence to research on their own. Finally, by implementing computers in both the classroom and the Writing Center, I help students to become informed and assured learners and writers. These students no longer fear the computer, they no longer fear research, and they no longer fear college writing tasks now that they have this important ally at their disposal. §

Culture Shock (*continued from page 1*)

I was less than careful with paperwork, forgot to sign myself or clients in and out, or neglected my timesheets returned to haunt me.

While I was surprised by the obvious size and procedural differences between the Wright and MU Writing Centers, I also found fascinating similarities. Right away, I noticed the sense of community that developed among tutors at both schools. Particularly at commuter schools, as both are, students often feel like they're not part of any campus community. I remember how the Writing Center staff at Wright made me feel welcome and provided an on-campus community. The situation at MU is similar. Reading/Writing Lab tutors become friends; "hang out" in the Lab even when they're off the clock; and work their tutoring magic with each other, frequently discussing their classwork and writing.

At MU, we're less isolated than at Wright; tutors from the Math Lab frequently come into our lab to use the computers, and the Math Specialist's office is located virtually in the Lab. While Wright's Center had a larger space and staff, it could sometimes feel detached from the rest of the University. At MU, though, we're attached to Student Services, so we interact with advisors, counselors, and adjuncts regularly.

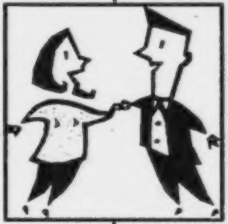
Another (unfortunate) similarity between the labs where I've worked is that we're constantly battling misconceptions about the services that we provide. At both schools, many people perceive us as grammar "fixers" with little to offer to non-remedial students. Interestingly, both centers are located in the basement, and I've wondered if that placement reflects these erroneous perceptions about the clients that we serve.

Despite these differences and perhaps because of the similarities, I have formulated a broader definition of our mission: to help students and each other. It might be easy for me to see the most familiar way as the "right" way; however, there are many right ways. It's all about perspectives and positions. §

International Students in the Writing Center

Jeff Birkenstein, Scott Kremer, Jennifer Pour, and Tiffany Wilson-Mobley
Tutors—University of Kentucky

Here at the University of Kentucky, we recently celebrated the long-awaited grand opening of our new library! The library is a state-of-the-art facility; all computers are wired for Internet connectivity, bookshelves operate electronically (complete with an electric eye and automatic shut-off to ensure that no one gets crushed), and laptops are available for checkout. As the University moves into the new library, the University of Kentucky Writing Center will move into its new space. The Center will feature extensive computer connections and even a waiting lounge!



With our new and improved surroundings came a debate among the director, Dr. Gail Cummins, and the tutors about whether we should adopt a new name—The Communication Center. In our existing Writing Center we offer a variety of services besides writing consultations: videotaped speaking help, Spanish tutoring, and numerous writing workshops. New this year is the International Conversational Hour, which we created and implemented. ICH is an informal weekly gathering for international and American students to relax and to discuss various issues. Our participants represent all levels of English proficiency. Three students attended our first meeting; now we host fifteen to twenty students every week. Visitors drop in as their schedules permit, and the service is free, although many ESL students ask about the price.

With more and more American universities competing to attract international students—both for diversity and for revenue—it is important that the needs of these international students be met. You probably agree that international students frequently take advantage of the Writing Center. ICH grew out of this patronage. We at UK noticed that international students sit in class all day and *listen* to their instructors speak English, then return home to speak their native language. Many participants tell us that ICH is their only opportunity to practice comprehensive and practical English.

All facets of language acquisition are inter-connected. ICH has taken off because of international students' craving for this type of interaction. At UK, the German Department hosts a conversation hour, and the Spanish and French Departments have their own versions as well. The concept is universal; however, when we presented our initial ideas and findings at the 1997 National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing in Lexington, Kentucky, we were astonished at the audience response. Tutors recognized that ICH is practical, beneficial, and easy to implement, yet few other Writing Centers offer such a program.

The Communication Center is a natural extension of the modern Writing Center. Many Writing Centers provide services other than writing consultations, and ICH is the perfect way to attract new students to the Writing Center. As our Center grows, we educate incoming TA's about the many strategies for meeting international students' needs. The possible rewards of ICH for both the students and the University are numerous. We encourage discussion about and implementation of such a program in your Writing Center. Please contact us at WRITINGCENTER@lsv.uky.edu. §

Creative Writing (*continued from page 1*)

writer. Here are some important considerations to keep in mind:

- What do you think about the **characters**? If a character's action seems out of place or unnecessary, ask the author why the character performs the action and what this does for both the character development and the plot.
- Does the **dialogue** make sense? Remember, when it comes to dialect, it is always better to drop it than to use it poorly.
- Is the **point of view** consistent?
- Does the story contain potentially **offensive material** (i.e. vulgar language, sexual connotations, sexism, or racism)? If this material is present, and it seems as though it may be unnecessary, ask the writer why he or she included it. If the explanation is insufficient, perhaps the author will reconsider his or her choice of words.

Remember that the writer is studying creative writing and should have knowledge about everything on the above list. Although the tutor should have some idea of what to look for, he or she does not have to be an expert on character development or dialogue. Instead, the tutor's duty involves guiding the author to consider what he or she has written and whether it makes sense.

Tutoring cover letters may be more comfortable, but a little fiction can be a lot of fun every so often. Enjoy it! §

The Revenge of the English Majors

Teraya White

Tutor—Pennsylvania State University

There are very few majors that spark as much debate as English. I recently attended a conference and, during icebreakers, someone asked me about my major. Without hesitation I replied, "English."

"I assume that you want to teach," she said.

"I have no intentions of teaching," I told her. "I want to be an attorney."

After glaring at me for a few seconds, she berated my major for being unchallenging, non-marketable, and just plain idiotic. Needless to say, I was appalled.

While teaching is a worthwhile profession, it is not the only option for an English major. The beauty of English is its broad approach, which provides an infinite number of career possibilities that include, but are not limited to, teaching. English gives students an opportunity to hone their skills not only in writing, but also in research and critical thinking. In the next millennium, employers will search for people who possess these very skills.

The argument that English is an easy major is perhaps the most incredible. The largest component of the major is writing—a fearful and unpleasant task that many college students try to evade. Writing is the English student's reality. English majors learn to choose their words carefully, to support their arguments, and most of all, to deal with feedback. Writing also takes time, patience, and an enormous amount of creativity—it is not a mediocre task! If writing is easy, then why do students frequent writing centers in search of help? English majors realize the challenges of writing and rise to meet them.

I find it insulting that people do not realize the flexibility of the English major. When uninformed people assume that an English degree is non-marketable, I tell them to watch NBC because English majors probably write for "Friends," "ER," and "Law and Order." I suggest that they tune in to CNN to see the many congressmen who began their careers as English majors.

For many students, English is an honorable major that emphasizes creativity over cash. I am proud that my major taught me to treat writing not as an act, but an art! At a recent conference in Philadelphia, the executive producer of an upcoming film asked about my major. I beamed with great pride and exclaimed, "I am an English major!" She smiled and replied, "Oh really? So was I!" §

Falling Through the Cracks

Allison Bender

Tutor and graduate—University of Southern Indiana

As a tutor, I cannot help but wonder where the educational system has failed many of my tutees. Many students come to me for advice on their papers, but they cannot even write a complete, coherent sentence. These situations are frustrating to tutors like me because we have only a short time with our tutees and are not able to make up for twelve years of education. What we can do is help these students to understand the mistakes that they have made and guide them toward becoming better writers. In this way, we can protect our tutees from falling through the cracks once again.

When I was in middle and high school, many writing teachers disregarded the different learning styles of their students and taught the same way they were taught in school—desks in rows, students quiet and still, and lessons centered around the teacher. Most of my teachers had little education beyond their teaching licenses and did not try to find out how their students learned. I am happy to report that this trend is changing; education departments are realizing that students learn more readily when they are free to take an active role in their lessons. As tutors, we should take the time to find out how our tutees learn most successfully and cater to those needs. However, sometimes we find it easier to correct a paper for them without explanation. We cannot allow ourselves to adopt this bad habit.

> *"To a pre-service teacher, it is upsetting that some students are too far gone to enjoy the writing process."*

After my graduation in December 1998, I plan to teach high-school English. Most likely, my students will be like my tutees, and it will be difficult to undo the negativity they feel toward writing. To a pre-service teacher, it is upsetting that some students are too far gone to enjoy the writing process. As a teacher, I will try to instill the value of writing as communication to my students, just as I do with my tutees. This will be difficult at times, but I feel that I owe these students the time and effort to head them toward improvement. My wish for the future is to keep students from falling throught the cracks so that they can experience success in their college writing classes. §

Abstracting: An Advanced Listening Skill for Tutors and Tutees

David C. Brainard
Tutor and graduate—St. Lawrence University's Master's program

The tutor's gift is the ability to facilitate another's learning without harming that person's dignity. In tutoring there is a relationship—often between two people, though sometimes more than two are involved—meant to stimulate academic growth. Because tutoring happens outside the classroom and in a context of concentrated effort, the tutoring relationship can be equal in all ways other than the designated role of the tutor. That is, because the tutor and the writer both concentrate on a similar end, the tutoring can take place in a context of equality. This equality can occur despite the tutor's supposed advanced knowledge of the topics discussed during tutoring. In tutoring writing, for instance, the tutor is certainly not an expert on the writer's work. A tutor's main goal is not to *tell* the writer what to write, but to *help* the writer to work with his or her existing context—perspective, experience, knowledge, and so on.

One way to piece together this fragmented information is throught the abstracting process. Abstracting is the thinking process by which we lend meaning to something we have named, and we lend different levels of meaning to different names of a similar entity or event (Bois 1996). In the process of tutoring, the writer names entities and events with his or her words. The words on the page are the basic information from which both the writer and the tutor can abstract more detailed information. Both will try to answer questions about what is written, why it is written, how the thought process occurs, what the thought means, and how the thought workds in the context of the writing. The possible answers to these questions are abstractions from the existing information.

In the tutoring process, a few specific kinds of abstraction can be particularly useful. One can attempt to abstract the nature of errors—not what kinds of errors exist, but how they came to exist. That is, tutors can ask, "How did the flaw come to be part of the writing?" This what/how distinction is important because humans don't tend to make errors deliberately. Thus, it can be abstracted that a writer's errors are part of his or her existing understanding of the written language and he or she does not fundamentally know how not to make the error. Similar to abstracting the nature of errors is abstracting the nature of writing patterns. A tutor can ask, "Where did these patterns come from? How were they formed, and why?"

Everyone abstracts. Writers directly concerned with awareness have suggested that few people are conscious of their abstracting (Bois 1996). Becoming conscious of abstracting helps the tutoring process by allowing writers to expand concepts, to develop ideas, and to gain greater fluency (Meyer and Smith 1987). Becoming conscious of abstracting means becoming aware of where one's thoughts, sentences, and phrases originate. It means learning why and how thoughts are formed. It means specifically noticing the whole process of thinking and writing. Noticing this process makes a writer aware of the details of his or her own thinking and provides writers with more creative choices. §

Bois, J. S. (1996). *The art of awareness.* Santa Monica: Continuum Press.

Meyer, E. and L. Smith (1987). *The practical tutor.* New York: Oxford UP.

RESUME BOOSTERS

With summer and graduation fast approaching, many tutors are searching for jobs. When writing your cover letters and resumes, are you at a loss for words? Check out these **RESUME BOOSTERS** devised during a collaborative session at the 1998 National Conference for Peer Tutors in Writing.

Special thanks to Dr. Twila Yates Papay (Rollins College) and Dr. Beth Rapp Young (University of Central Florida), who facilitated the discussion. Also, thanks to Dr. Karen Slater (Rollins College), who recorded this information.

SKILLS EMPLOYERS SEEK

Mental agility
Critical thinking
Collaboration and teamwork
Writing (various types)
Listening and speaking
Presenting
Reading and researching
Technological experience
Accuracy and attention to detail
Interpersonal skills
Creativity and inventiveness
Professionalism
Work ethic
Positive attitude

SKILLS TUTORS POSSESS

- Collaboration
- Training
- Service learning
    - Tecnological experience
    - Presenting
    - Outreach and recruitment
    - Advertising and marketing
    - Writing and publishing
- Listening and speaking
- Reading and researching
- Problem solving
- Critical and creative thinking
- People skills—LD, ESL, ESD
- Multi-tasking (flexibility)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

16th Annual National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing
Unmasking Writing: A Collaborative Process

Date: October 29-31, 1999
Location: The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, Pennsylvania

Writers and tutors often wear masks. The mask can be a persona, usually knowingly chosen, but not always. Sometimes we don them unconsciously. Masks can also be formulaic thinking, such as a five-paragraph essay and a preconceived tutoring agenda.

"Unmasking" can mean exploring, questioning, explaining, probing, finding, or negotiating meanings that don't declare themselves at first. "Unmasking" can signify, then, discovering with writers their achievements that may have been obscured from the writer by the linguistic and cultural "masks" they wear. "Unmasking" can also mean helping the writer to see what is not yet achieved and, until the tutor and writer have talked about it, not seen or known.

We invite you to propose presentations for the 16th Annual NCPTW. We emphasize tutor-led, active workshops, roundtables, and discussion panels. The conference seeks to explore issues of collaboration and trust in our writing centers, as well as to investigate any dimension of peer tutoring.

Please include the following with your proposal:

- Name and position of contact person
- Address, phone number, and e-mail address
- Time required (15, 25, 50, or 75 minutes)
- Intended audience
- Format (workshop, discussion, demonstration, etc.)
- Presenters and their positions
- 150-250 word description
- Title and 50 word abstract (to be included in the program)
- Equipment needed
- Additional concerns

Please send to: Julie Story, Conference Director, Center for Excellence in Writing, 206 Boucke Building, University Park, PA 16802.

Do you want to see a Fall 1999 issue of ***THE DANGLING MODIFIER****?* We need your SUBMISSIONS!

The Dangling Modifier, an outgrowth of the National Conference for Peer Tutors in Writing, is a newsletter by tutors, for tutors. We publish articles by tutors and directors alike, so if you have some insights that you would like to share, submit them! Remember that tutoring is not just about what we do in one-on-one interactions—feel free to examine the other facets of what we

Submissions should be 500 words or less, and shorter pieces are encouraged. Editors reserve the right to edit all submissions for grammar and length. Please include your full name, your position (tutor, director, or otherwise), your college or university, your phone number, and your email address. Direct your submissions and inquiries to:

The Dangling Modifier
The Center for Excellence in Writing
219 Boucke Building
University Park, PA 16802
Fax: (814) 863-8704

Or email your submissions and inquiries to Josie Huzinec, editor of the Dangling Modifier at **1derwoman@psu.edu**.

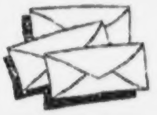
Submission Deadline: November 15, 1999

Summer
Reading

Whether you're lounging by the pool, hiking through the woods, or kicking back in air-conditioned comfort, books often make the best summer companions.

We at *The Dangling Modifier* would love to hear about your favorite summer reading. What do you like to read, and why? Make sure to include the title and author of the book (or books), as well as your reasons for choosing it. Responses will appear in the Fall 1999 issue.

Drop us a line at 219 Boucke Building, University Park, PA 16802. Or email Josie Huzinec at 1derwoman@psu.edu.



Have a great summer and HAPPY READING!

The Dangling Modifier

Volume 6, Number 2
A national newsletter by and for peer tutors in writing, produced in association with the NCPTW.
Summer 1999

PREVIEW ISSUE

The 1999 National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing

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Whose Is the Face in the Mask?

The NCPTW Seeks to Unmask Writing Through Collaboration

by James P. Purdy

"Masquerade, paper faces on parade, masquerade, hide your face so the world will never find you. Masquerade, every face a different shade, masquerade, look around, there's another mask behind you . . ." opens the second act of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Phantom of the Opera*—a musical shrouded in mystery centered around a man who wears a mask. Like the mysterious Phantom of the Opera, writing tutors and writers also wear masks. Instead of being physical masks, the masks that tutors and writers wear are intangible masks reflecting different experiences, expectations, and expertise. Despite their intangibility, they are just as important in shaping the events in the writing center environment. The sixteenth annual National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing (NCPTW) will explore the theme "Unmasking Writing: A Collaborative Process" to discuss and de-mystify the issues surrounding the masks that writers and writing tutors frequently wear.

This year's conference, which runs October 29-31 at The Pennsylvania State University's University Park campus, features more than sixty workshops, presentations, panel discussions, and talks from national and international participants. Over fifty different colleges, universities, high schools, and community outreach tutoring programs will share their insight and ideas about the writing center experience. In a collaborative effort, presenters and participants will exchange views on tutoring (*page 2*)

Whose Is the Face in the Mask? (*continued from page 1*)

programs and practices, the composing process, and writing center administration. The conference will showcase a diverse and impressive range of presentation topics, including on-line and Internet tutoring, reflections of South African peer tutors, tutoring English as a second language, tutoring adult writers, tutoring learning disabled students, surviving overconfident writers, group tutoring, and play in the writing center.

The NCPTW features numerous events to both edify and entertain. The conference includes a collaborative keynote address entitled "A Tutoring Narrative in Four Part (Dis)Harmony" by tutors and faculty from The Ohio State University. A luncheon at the renowned Nittany Lion Inn will showcase a speech from Nancy Sharkey, assistant to the managing editor of the *New York Times*, who will discuss the facets of an ideal relationship between an editor and writer. Additionally, after time spent "unmasking writing," participants will don masks of their own for a costume (or come-as-you-are) dance party at the Nittany Lion Inn. Participants will dance the night away to tunes from DJ Roger Tharp. To further foster an atmosphere of collaboration, prizes will be awarded for the best individual and collaborative costumes. A create-your-own ice cream sundae bar at the dance party will sweeten the event by featuring Penn State's famous creamery ice cream.

This year's conference features more than sixty workshops sponsored by campus and community tutoring programs from around the country.

The sixteenth annual National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, "Unmasking Writing: A Collaborative Process," promises to enlighten and excite those connected with the tutoring of writing. Through a collaborative effort, many of the masks donned by tutors and writers will be better understood and, if not shed completely, used to their advantage. Perhaps, like the Phantom of the Opera, writers and tutors will be able to remove their masks and leave them behind to reveal "whose is the face in the mask." §

Where Are "They" Now?

by Marleah Peabody

Universities seem to belong to that group of institutions that employs the notorious "They." Consider: The graduation requirements change, forcing you to rearrange your schedule at the last minute. You ask your advisor how this happened; he replies, "They decided that all Liberal Arts students needed to take Accounting 201." Or you walk into the union building and can't find a bathroom—people tell you, "They moved everything to make it more user-friendly." Well, you thought it was user-friendly before, when the bathroom wasn't hidden under the stairs in the remotest corner. But they didn't ask you, and that's the problem.

"They" have taken over at universities around the country. We, as students, often feel that the bureaucratic "They" won't allow us to speak for ourselves. It makes decisions (*page 4*)

On the Road

by Joshua Pelta-Heller

Ever since I enrolled in English 250, Peer Tutoring in Writing, I felt included in a network of peer tutors and writing center directors who travel from locales nationwide to convene at regional and national conferences. All members of this specialized web are concerned, first and foremost, with the development, growth, and supplementation of the writing and reading skills of students of all ages. And when in 1997 Ron Maxwell, the director of our Penn State Writing Center at University Park, asked the fledgling tutors of my class to accompany him to the regional conference at Franklin and Marshall College, he effectively included us as proponents of those goals, even before we were functional tutors.

The encouragement to get involved didn't end there. At the conference we met with face after smiling face, friends linked in the network chain, most of whom were more than happy to discuss with us their approaches to peer tutoring and collaborative learning. Most importantly, throughout a day of workshops, presentations, and keynote speeches, all directors and administrators involved seemed primarily concerned with the involvement and inclusion of the tutors who had come.

On a national scale, this concern is greatly amplified. Rarely do attendees get lectured; rather, presentations are designed to engage their audiences in discussion and to promote thoughtful response on everyone's behalf. Keynote speeches have included current tutors, returning veteran tutors (now in the workforce) who speak of the skills they sharpened or gained while working at their respective centers, and celebrities from the Writing Center field. Finally, conference wrap-up sessions have been entirely collaborative environments, where tutors and administrators brainstormed thoughts for the development and improvement of future conferences.

The learning environment that writing conferences offer is unique and fresh, and it is specifically tailored to involve, include, and educate. The influence of this environment reaches all corners as take-home messages accompany each tutor and director back to his or her center. The power of collaborative and communicative learning can benefit each student of any age or school, and the conferences for peer tutors in writing provide the setting and tools for such concepts to thrive. §

17 Years of Hospitality for the NCPTW

1984	*Brown University*
1985	*Bucknell University*
1986	*Georgetown University*
1987	*Purdue University*
1988	*Skidmore College*
1989	*Youngstown State University*
1990	*Pennsylvania State University*
1991	*University of Vermont, Champlain College, Saint Michael's College, & Trinity College of Vermont*
1992	*Indiana University of Pennsylvania*
1993	*Grand Valley State University*
1994	*University of Montevallo & Rollins College*
1995	*Ball State University & East Central University*
1996	*East Central University & Colorado College*
1997	*University of Kentucky*
1998	*Plattsburgh State University of New York*
1999	*Pennsylvania State University*
2000	*Lafayette College & Muhlenberg College*

Where Are "They" Now? (*continued from page 2*)

on our behalf every day, and many of us feel that we can't escape its influence. Many of the students we tutor no doubt feel the same way. Perhaps, when they come to the writing center, they expect decisions to be made for them. Perhaps, when tutees walk in for the first time, they expect to find "They" waiting for them. It's wonderful to see the looks on some tutees' faces when they discover that peer tutors don't want to take power away--they want to empower.

Just as we as peer tutors can empower our tutees, the NCPTW works hard to empower us as students and tutors. The NCPTW conference throws "They" out the window. Students lead it, students help plan it, students participate, and students inspire it. It's all about us. No "They" could do it better, because "They" are not interested in the idea of collaboration, which forms the backbone of peer tutoring. The NCPTW is all about students helping students, and our avid frontline participation in this conference is one of our strongest testimonies to that statement.

Once a year at this conference, we can attend discussion sessions, workshops, and panels run by other students, based on students' ideas and experiences. Why is this so important? Because it gives us a voice. NCPTW respects us as students and respects our role as peer tutors, and it allows and encourages us to share our ideas with each other and with writing center faculty and staff who value our opinions. The NCPTW conference offers us the opportunity to speak for ourselves and to voice our opinions in order to learn and to teach our fellow tutors how to better help other students. Chances like this don't come along often in university life. I'm glad we can be a part of it. §

WORKSHOP PREVIEW

A Hybrid of a Hybrid:

Tutoring Peer-Response Groups

*by Melissa Dunbar**

**Melissa Dunbar will present this session with Carrie Floom.*

Q. What do you call a group of classmates who meet in groups to discuss their work?
A. A peer response group.
Q. What do you call it when someone brings a paper to a trained writing consultant?
A. A tutorial.
Q. So, what do you call a peer response group that has a tutor assigned to it?
A. I don't know. . ..

This imaginary dialogue is based on an Ohio State University program, which combines students and resources from the university's basic writing program, English department, and writing center. Two primary groups of students are involved: those enrolled in the first year basic writing class, 110W, and those taking English 467, an upper-division writing theory and practice class. Both of these classes are taught by faculty in the English department, yet part of the administrative funding comes from The Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing (CSTW), which houses the university writing center. The Peer Writing Consultant Program (PWCP) works in the following way: Students enrolled in 110W register for class four days a week, three days of which they meet with faculty from the English department. On the fourth (*page 8*)

Director's Chair

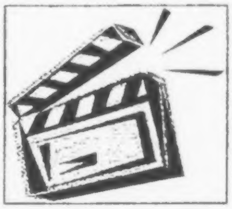
Sixteenth National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing:

A Collaborative Effort

Julie A. Story, Conference Director

Almost a year has passed since we had such a good time at the terrific 1998 NCPTW hosted by Plattsburgh State University of New York. As a part of Penn State's Writing Center administrative staff for the past ten years, I am an NCPTW veteran and am well acquainted with its history—due to my great fortune in working with Dr. Ron Maxwell, our former director and a pillar of the conference since its inception. Through my time with Ron, I learned about the hallmark of the NCPTW. In this national arena, the quality of one's ideas is not defined by institutional rank. Faculty and staff directors assume a supporting role. Most participants see the conference as an opportunity for tutors to extend themselves within the peer relation and be exposed to scholars and professionals, thus enhancing the students' education.

Another innovative approach to the NCPTW is the students' major role in creating a plan for the conference and executing it. When Penn State hosted the conference in 1990 for over four hundred participants, I enjoyed being a member of the program committee and watching Ron very successfully coordinate a huge collaborative effort "by tutors for tutors." Therefore, last November when Penn State's Writing Center director Dr. Jon Olson approached me about being the point person for the 1999 NCPTW, I was very excited about our hosting it at Penn State again—but overwhelmed by the thought of the great amount of time, energy, and work that a true collaborative effort would require.



In the spirit of the NCPTW, I have tried to gather as much student input and contribution as possible at every feasible step, involving tutors in meaningful roles that would develop their professional skills and take their education beyond the classroom. Last spring, Penn State's thirty-five peer tutors formed keynote, hospitality, social, and program committees, each led by a student chair. After brainstorming a theme (the hardest part!), they produced and distributed the call for proposals and generated the content areas and graphics for the registration form. Currently, peer tutor Jim Purdy is undertaking a three-credit internship in English to develop the program brochure and gain experience in article writing and editing. Some groups of tutors are planning to present and chair sessions. They will assign a student recorder to each program event so that we can provide the proceedings online for national availability afterwards. And as you can see, Josie Huzinec has solicited articles from the Writing Center community to put this pre-conference *Dangling Modifier* issue together. Others are creating decorations, designing a conference t-shirt, hiring a DJ, planning icebreakers and knockout costumes for our parties, and gathering downtown and campus info. All of our peer tutors, as well as some other student groups and individuals they have recruited, will contribute to providing the best on-campus hospitality and recreational opportunities to attendees. (*page 6*)

FEATURED SPEAKER PREVIEW

New York Times Editor Presents the Human Side of the Editor/Writer Relationship

by James P. Purdy

In her book *What I Saw at the Revolution*, presidential speechwriter Peggy Noonan dispenses editing advice: "Remember the waterfront shack with the sign FRESH FISH SOLD HERE. Of course it's fresh, we're on the ocean. Of course it's for sale, we're not giving it away. Of course it's here, otherwise the sign would be someplace else. The final sign: FISH." While Noonan's advice centers around a humorous account of editing, she raises an important question: What is the ideal relationship between an editor and writer that facilitates making such emendations? Nancy Sharkey, assistant to the managing editor of the *New York Times*, will answer this and other questions as the featured speaker at the sixteenth annual National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing (NCPTW).

On October 30, 1999, at the NCPTW luncheon at The Nittany Lion Inn, Ms. Sharkey will speak on the importance of humanizing the editor/writer relationship. (*page 8*)

Director's Chair (*continued from page 5*)

The peer tutors' enthusiasm and work last spring and this fall have allowed me to focus on persuading administrators at Penn State to provide the necessary funding to host the NCPTW. For the past several years, the organization has relied solely on the host institutions for funding the conference. Thus, this aspect of the conference has become a campus collaboration, wherever it is held. Here, contributors include the English Department, eleven college undergraduate deans, The Schreyer Institute for Innovation in Learning, The Graduate School, the Office of Undergraduate Education, the University Learning Resource Center, the Program Innovation Fund, and the *New York Times*, "A Partner in Education with Penn State." This positive response reinforces the recognition that collaborative learning and effective communication through writing continue to be necessary skills that educational institutions promote for their members' success in society.

Accordingly, we are reassured that a forum for the discussion of peer tutoring is essential, especially one that highlights peer tutor presentations and brings people together from across the disciplines. Writing center staff from colleges, universities, and high schools can strengthen their ties to student support services and other academic units to further enhance collaborative learning in writing across the disciplines, community outreach programs, and literacy centers. Consequently, NCPTW continues to be a key resource in the peer tutoring of writing, communication skills, and community literacy.

As the last weekend in October nears, our investment this past year in preparation for the NCPTW has been well worth it! With much assistance from a strong campus-wide support team—especially Jon Olson, Ron Maxwell, and the peer tutors—Penn State is able to offer a high quality conference that is "by tutors for tutors." We look forward to welcoming everyone again and are ready to "party like it's 1999!" §

"The NCPTW is a unique and peculiar organization with no organization." Just ask Ron Maxwell.

by Josie Huzinec—Editor

When we decided to dedicate this issue of the Dangling Modifier to national conferences past and present, I decided that a conversation with Ron Maxwell was in order. The director of the Penn State Writing Center from 1986 to 1997, Ron was instrumental in establishing the NCPTW and ensuring its growth over the past sixteen years. I wanted to learn more about the conference's organization, history, and mission. Who better to ask than a man who was there from the start? So I sat down with Ron at a local bagel shop—he drank coffee, I sipped a Very Berry smoothie—and we talked about the "unique and peculiar organization" that is the NCPTW.

When the first conference convened at Brown University in 1984, the attendees agreed that they wanted a yearly interaction. A small group of tutors and directors formed a steering team to organize the next year's conference at Bucknell. "The national conference is unlike other conferences in that it has no officers, fees, or membership," Ron explained. "It is loosely associated—but not." Ron noted that, although the NCPTW lacks official guidelines, it is held together by something infinitely more durable—commitment.

The commitment of writing center tutors and directors to the idea of collaborative learning and to the value of sharing their experiences with others at a national level has kept the NCPTW strong. Dedication to the work of writing centers has prompted many universities to host the NCPTW despite the fact that their individual institutions must bear the brunt of the conference expenses. Likewise, commitment has fueled the dialogue of the hundreds of tutors and directors who attend the NCPTW each year.

In addition to this unique sense of commitment, the conference fosters a singular mission among its attendees and administrators. This "students first" philosophy—preference is given to student-driven presentations—is "rooted in our notion of collaborative learning," Ron said. He explained that, in their everyday work, writing tutors are placed in leadership positions naturally. While writing center work promotes leadership at the local level, the NCPTW expands undergraduate opportunities for leadership on a regional and national scale. Of course, the NCPTW is our annual national event, but regional conferences sponsored by the Central Pennsylvania Consortium and the Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association allow tutors to get involved as well.

As our discussion moved away from the conference, Ron and I began to talk about the "students as consumers" philosophy that has begun to infiltrate university pedagogy. Following this logic, the university is a product to be sold and delivered, and colleges must become corporate in their activities. "The currently fashionable conception is at odds with writing centers' very foundation—collaborative learning," Ron noted. "This metaphor disregards, misunderstands, and at worst completely ignores the needs of the student. In addition, it shifts the role of the teacher to service provider or producer and values lecture-driven lessons as the most efficient way to 'deliver the goods.'" We agreed that the concept of collaborative (*page 10*)

A Hybrid of a Hybrid (*continued from page 6*)

class day, 110W students meet in peer groups of two to five students with one or two students from English 467. Students in English 467, or peer writing consultants (PWCs), meet with their instructor two days a week and also work with two different groups of 110W students during the week. The weekly peer tutoring sessions are required for both the 110W and 467 students, but there are no teachers present at the sessions.

In order to keep all these different groups running smoothly, a graduate student, funded by the CSTW, works as the Peer Consulting Coordinator. Holding this position for the last two years, I have had close contact with all the program's constituents--teachers, students, and administrators--and I have been able to observe the teaching of English 467 and 110W and peer tutoring sessions. Through my experience, as well as countless conversations with the students and teachers involved with the program, I can confidently say that PWCs cannot be easily classified as peer group members or tutors. Rather, the PWCP has created a hybrid position for PWCs by combining peer groups with tutoring. This hybrid situation complicates popular definitions of peer tutoring, peer-tutor's roles in producing "better writers," and notions of peer groups. Since what happens in the peer consulting groups at Ohio State is a mixture of tutoring and peer group work, research and pedagogical strategies for both peer response groups and tutoring are relevant to our program, yet, at the same time, this literature does not adequately address the specific situation of PWCs in the PWCP.

Both peer response and tutoring have evolved out of social constructionist epistemologies. The conflation of these two pedagogical models can be problematic, but these complications have not been formally articulated because efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of the PWCP have focused on the program as a whole. In 1996, for example, Lisa Ede conducted a review of the PWCP. After talking with faculty, students, and staff, Ede concluded that the PWCP "fulfilled its basic educational mission, which is to engage students in collaborative experiences that are mutually beneficial--and to do so in the context of credit-bearing courses that both reinforce and are enriched by this collaboration." I concur with Ede's positive assessment of the overall program, but, even though the PWCP is continually evaluated--either formally or informally--I am concerned with the absence of analysis of the particular situation of the PWCs. My goal for this presentation, then, is to make explicit some of the unspoken assumptions that govern the PWCP, particularly those assumptions that affect PWCs. By doing so, I hope to point out some of the subtle, yet pervasive complexities of this program and offer some suggestions for improving upon the program's existing structure. §

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Ede, L. 20 May 1996. *Memo to Beverly Moss*, Ohio State University, Columbus, OH.

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Lunsford, A. 1991. *Writing Center Journal*. 12: 3-10. Rpt. in *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*. Eds. C. Murphy and S. Sherwood. New York: St. Martin's,1995. 36-42.

Murphy, C. 1994. *Intersections: Theory-practice in the Writing Center*. Eds. J. Mullin and R. Wallace. Urbana: NCTE. 25-38.

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Check out these NCPTW Expo Exibitors

- *Beacon Conference*
- *National Writing Centers Association*
- *Houghton Mifflin Company*
- *Harbrace College*
- *Addison-Wesley Longman/Benjamin Cummings*
- *Allyn & Bacon Publishers*
- *Bedford/St. Martin's*
- *McGraw-Hill*
- *Mayfield Publishing*
- *The New York Times*
- *Svoboda's Books*
- *Barnes and Noble Booksellers*

1999 NCPTW Expo

by Julie Story

We guarantee that when you enter Thomas Building, the site of the conference sessions, something at our 1999 NCPTW Expo will catch your interest! Make sure to take a break and peruse the latest publications in the fields of writing centers, composition, literature, linguistics, and pedagogy. Publishing, writing center, teaching, tutoring, and writing contest organizations from the national, state, and local levels will provide information on their programs, writing software, publications, calls for proposals and manuscripts, services, and memberships. Penn State tutors will offer conference t-shirts and a place to rest your feet and mind as well!

We also invite student and professional tutors, teachers, writing center directors, and other tutoring program administrators to display and offer any materials associated with the tutoring of writing at their colleges, universities, high schools, community outreach programs, and literacy centers. Participants will be able to strengthen professional and scholarly contacts and learn about the writing and tutoring programs at other institutions. The diverse range of information available will especially benefit those interested in developing or improving their own writing centers. §

Beacon Conference Contest Encourages Excellence in Two-Year Colleges

by Carrie Myers

Beacon is a conference for student scholars at two-year colleges. Students submit papers from a variety of disciplines such as nursing, the arts, gender studies, and technology. Both the student winner and the faculty mentor are awarded cash prizes. Beacon has been held in the New York state since 1993. In the spring of 2001, the conference will be in Pennsylvania for the first time at Lehigh Carbon Community College (LCCC). For more information on how your students or institution can be involved, please see Dr. Carrie Myers, LCCC Writing Center Director, at the NCPTW Expo. §

New York Times Editor (*continued from page 6*)

Through examples and personal anecdotes, Ms. Sharkey will outline the four stages necessary for an editor to establish an intimate, collaborative relationship with a new writer. From the introduction to the work to the revision to the goodnight, Ms. Sharkey will illustrate how an editor can create an intimate editor/writer relationship. Not only is an intimate relationship important in the editing field, it is crucially important to the tutor/writer relationship. To be successful, both must be collaborative. Both tutors and editors must strive to create a comfortable, cooperative, personal atmosphere for the writer with whom they work. After her speech, Ms. Sharkey will answer questions from the audience. She affirms that, if they follow these stages, "Eventually, editor and writer work together like an old married couple who complete each other's sentences. It's an incredibly satisfying relationship."

> *"Eventually, editor and writer work together like an old married couple who complete each other's sentences. It's an incredibly satisfying relationship."*

Ms. Sharkey brings with her years of experience and expertise in the editing field. She joined the *New York Times* staff in 1984 as a copy editor and since then has served in various positions, including recruiting editor, assistant metropolitan editor, and education editor. Prior to her tenure at the *Times*, she was the city editor at the *Times Union* in Albany, New York, where she started as an assistant city editor in September 1981. Before this time she was a copy editor at the *Bergen Record* in Hackensack, New Jersey, and a reporter for the *Times Record* in Troy, New York. Ms. Sharkey graduated from the State University of New York at Albany in 1975 with a B.S. in English. §

The Columbia Dictionary of Quotations. 1995. New York: Columbia University Press.

You're Invited: Spring 2000 MAWCA

The Spring 2000 conference of the Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association will be held April 1 at Montgomery College in Rockville, Maryland. For more information, email the Conference Chair, Jeannie Dadgostar, at jdadgost@mc.cc.md.us.

Editorial (*continued from page 7*)

learning places students in more active roles; when they need something, they are actively involved in getting it for themselves. Likewise, collaborative learning views the teacher as a designer of learning opportunities and a person who presents students with problems, not answers.

Writing centers that are founded on the principles of collaboration (not all are!) allow students to put their coursework to immediate social use. They encourage students, both as tutors and as tutees, to take responsibility in creating and shaping their own learning experiences. For this reason, tutors have every reason to be proud of the power they instill in their clients. As Ron so aptly put it, "The national conference is a kind of celebration of our year." We certainly have a lot to celebrate. §

The NCPTW Ron Maxwell Award for Distinguished Leadership in Promoting the Collaborative Learning Practices of Peer Tutors in Writing

Presented annually by the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing to a professional in the organization who has contributed with distinction to undergraduate student development through promoting collaborative learning among peer tutors in writing.

As Ron Maxwell himself noted, "the excellent work of peer tutors includes a wide range of collaborative learning activity--in training programs, in peer tutor staff development, in delivering actual tutoring services (working with other writers in our centers), and in that outreach work that takes peer tutors beyond the writing center (into the community and across the campus) where tutors, through modeling ways in which undergraduates can take more complete charge of their learning, impact upon the learning styles of others."

This award recognizes an individual for dedication to and leadership in collaborative learning in writing centers, for aiding students in together taking on more responsibility for their learning; thus for promoting the work of peer tutors. Its presentation also denotes extraordinary service to the evolution of this conference organization.

While other aspects of a candidate's professional performance—e.g., work with professional tutors, writing center research and publication—are respected by the NCPTW and are surely interrelated, this award is intended to recognize meritorious work in an area too little acknowledged.

Such leadership may be demonstrated in a variety of ways, including but not limited to:

- a record of bringing peer tutors to present at the Conference
- service to the NCPTW through hosting the Conference, serving as program chair, leading in the search for future sites, etc.
- aiding students in the assumption of increasing responsibility for their learning
- fostering leadership skills among peer tutors
- showing evidence of leadership in collaborative learning on the home campus
- developing innovative peer tutoring programs in the home community
- in general, welcoming and meeting new challenges in leading a center guided by a collaborative learning philosophy.

Selection Process:

Because the NCPTW is so happily informal, a small awards committee, consisting of several recent hosts or Chairs of the Conference, Jon Olson, and Ron Maxwell, solicits nominations, reviews the candidates, and chooses an annual recipient. A small plaque and modest cash prize is funded by endowment (from Ron and Mary Maxwell). The administrator of the award is Jon Olson, director of the Penn State Center for Excellence in Writing. §

If You Want a Souvenir, NCPTW Shirts Are Here!

The Penn State Writing Center is happy to announce that it will be offering t-shirts for the 1999 National Conference for Peer Tutoring in Writing. Along with a picture of a brightly-colored mask drawn by a student artist, the shirts will have the words: "Unmasking Writing: A Collaborative Process, The Sixteenth Annual National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, The Pennsylvania State University." For only $12, a 100% cotton t-shirt can be purchased in sizes S-XL. If you order a shirt, it will be available for you at registration when you arrive at Penn State. At present, the Penn State Writing Center is ordering a limited number of t-shirts, but if the number of requests exceeds the number of t-shirts available, an attempt will be made to obtain more shirts. For more information, please contact Eliza at eey101@psu.edu or (814) 862-4851. Orders are due by October 15.

To order a shirt or shirts, please compile the following information:

- *Name
- *Name of the institution you will be representing
- *Number of t-shirts
- *Size of t-shirts—S, M, L, XL

Mail this information, along with a check ($12 per t-shirt) to:

Eliza Young
c/o The Penn State Writing Center
219 Boucke Building
University Park, PA 16802

The Dangling Modifier Call For Submissions

The Dangling Modifier, an outgrowth of the National Conference for Peer Tutors in Writing, is a newsletter by tutors, for tutors. We publish articles by tutors and directors alike, so if you have some insights that you would like to share, submit them! Submissions should be 500 words or less, and shorter pieces are encouraged. Editors reserve the right to edit all submissions for grammar and length. Please include your full name, your position (tutor, director, or otherwise), your college or university, your phone number, and your email address. Direct your submissions and inquiries to:

The Dangling Modifier
The Center for Excellence in Writing
219 Boucke Building
University Park, PA 16802
Fax: (814) 863-8704

Or email your submissions and inquiries to Josie Huzinec, editor of the Dangling Modifier, at **1derwoman@psu.edu**.

The Danglin g Modifier

Volume 7, Number 1 A national newsletter by and for peer tutors in writing, produced in association with the NCPTW Fall Issue 2000

Mission Statement:

The mission of *The Dangling Modifier* is to provide a national forum for ongoing conversation among peer tutors in writing. *The Dangling Modifier* is designed to stimulate discussion, promote national peer tutor activities, and share helpful information among writing centers across the nation. The editorial staff strives to select pieces that are interesting, controversial, original, and well-written.

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"Looking Ahead, Looking Back" at *The Dangling Modifier*

By Alex Doehrer

The Dangling Modifier is back after a year hiatus with the same philosophy of keeping tutors talking across writing center lines. Using the framework of the recent National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing at Merrimack College, "Looking Ahead, Looking Back," we will look at the history and future of *The Dangling Modifier*.

Looking back, the antecedent was an in-house newsletter at the Penn State writing center, which "came and went with the enthusiasm of tutors," said Ron Maxwell, the former Writing Center Director at Penn State.

The concept for the current model of *The Dangling Modifier* began with a group of Penn State peer tutors in 1993 at the NCPTW in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Volume one, issue one of *The Dangling Modifier* was published in the following year for the brainstorming workshop for the 1994 NCPTW in Birmingham, Alabama.

The workshop was led by a group of peer tutors from Penn State, but was attended mostly by writing center directors. With the goal of laying groundwork for the newsletter, the tutors and directors conferred and came to the conclusion that *The Dangling Modifier* should be published biannually in the fall and spring semesters.

The fall issue was designed to be a preview issue for the NCPTW conference held every October, and the spring issue was to respond with articles about the previous conference and to help writing centers conduct searches for new topic proposals. "It would ferment topics, and address what topics we should be attending to," said Maxwell.

Maxwell's role as advisor was to help find writing projects for the tutors. "We wanted to keep writing tutors writing by creating an ongoing project in which our tutors do what they talk about: writing," said the former writing center director.

With the first few issues, it was often difficult to obtain submissions because of the hectic schedules of writing tutors. "We learned in the early years it isn't enough to wave the flag," said Maxwell. "Tutors are busy people. Of what practical value, with no reward, would an article to *The Dangling Modifier* be for the busy peer tutors at writing centers across the nation? A grace note on a resume? Finally, we had the most success in going to the NCPTW, talking to people from specific workshops and inviting them to write up what their presentations were about."

In some cases, Penn State peer tutors would be "investigative reporters" and write their views on the presentations at the annual conference.

Some past features have included a featured writing center, The Director's Chair—sharing writing center directors' opinions, and articles about workshops at the NCPTW.

Our future will hold some of the same features and we will be adding some new ones, like the Tutor Guru, a question and answer column where tutors can send in questions or concerns about issues in writing or tutoring. Another section is the Dangling Doodlers' Page where readers may indulge in fun word puzzles created by current peer tutors.

Looking ahead, the new intern-based staff at Penn State advised by Julie Story, Assistant Director of the Writing Center, has high hopes that *The Dangling Modifier* will continue to be a "part of an ongoing nationwide peer tutor conversation" as stated in the very first issue. ☼

The Fine Line Between Tutoring and Plagiarism

by Traci Frye, Peer Tutor in Writing at Penn State University

When do our suggestions begin to infringe on authorship?

I can still remember my crazy seventh grade Language Arts teacher introducing my class to direct and indirect objects, how to avoid making some common grammatical errors, and how to improve our proofreading skills. Yet, the one lesson that stands out from all the others concerns plagiarism. When I first heard this word and interpreted the definition, I realized that I had technically been plagiarizing others since I began to write. After all, I had copied my teachers' definitions verbatim from the blackboard, duplicated countless poems, and quoted my friends without citing them as sources. Taking a deep breath and calming down a little, I rationalized that these techniques had helped me to learn basic writing skills and that I had not, in fact, committed any serious criminal violations in my first grade reading and writing class. I soon realized that the definition of plagiarism is not concrete and can vary widely depending on the people involved and the context in which they develop their writing. For instance, writing tutors help students to formulate their own ideas by offering critical thinking questions and examples, but do not actually write or simply proofread their papers for them.

On the other hand, the examples that a tutor gives or the ideas that they might imply can provide a role in the practice of plagiarism. According to John Peterson of Indiana State University, plagiarism can occur even when a writer uses another person's idea, opinion, theory, or paraphrases their spoken or written words without giving them credit. Students in the Writing Center often implement what their tutors say or use the examples that they give in their papers. Therefore, if a tutor helps a student to reword the thesis in their first paragraph, they are unknowingly contributing to the plagiarism of their own words.

Although the tutoring process does not always involve plagiarism, it does occur more often than anyone may realize. Tutors often willingly grant their suggestions and hint at how they would write something by asking the writer questions, which could also be construed as plagiarism. However, no matter what questions the tutor asks, the writer must brainstorm their own ideas. Thus, the writer assumes ultimate ownership of their written words. Tutors simply facilitate thoughts in writers, which refutes the notion that writers adopt "another's artistic or literary work, ideas, research, etc. as one's own" (Webster's Dictionary).

Successful tutoring equally engages the tutor and the writer in a collaborative process that encourages them to learn together in a cooperative atmosphere that allows them to develop and refine their writing skills. Once in awhile, a student will plagiarize the suggestions that their tutor offers, but glitches happen in every aspect of life because no system is completely flawless. One cannot possibly cite every idea, thought, or opinion that they have borrowed since they first learned to write. However, everyone must use caution to give credit where credit is due when helping someone to revise an assignment or when writing their own papers. ☼

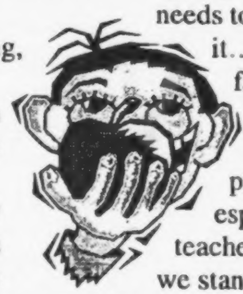
In the Middle: Negotiating Space Between Teacher and Students

Written and delivered by Liz Voltman of Montclair State University at the 17th Annual National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing at Merrimack College on October 15, 2000

As a second-year graduate assistant in the English Department and the Writing Center's coordinator at Montclair State University, I have gained invaluable experience through teaching and tutoring composition. Though upon reflection, I have come to question the current roles that we, as tutors, see ourselves taking on at the Writing Center.

"The variety of roles I'm filling enables me to see things from a variety of perspectives that are most likely difficult for the student and the teacher to see."

The variety of roles I fill enables me to see things from a variety of perspectives that are most likely difficult for the student and the teacher to see. As a graduate student who has written countless papers, I realize what a challenging, intimate, and often intimidating process academic writing and writing in general can be. Therefore, I certainly know the pressure that comes along with meeting teachers' expectations. As a teacher and tutor, I know what it means to either place these demands on students or have to help them meet these demands. Lastly, as a writer, I know the importance of feeling a sense of pride and connectedness to the writing I produce. But how do we help students to fit all of these roles... and is that, in essence, our purpose? I hope that as you read through this brief essay, you're prompted to reflect upon the roles you play at your Writing Center so that together we can continue this on-going dialogue about what we believe our genuine purpose as tutors should be in comparison to what it often actually is. I know that personally, sometimes I feel that what I want for students and what I provide are worlds apart. And it's easy for this central issue of purpose to get overlooked because we are so busy tutoring and handling the center's daily concerns, that the time we spend reflecting is minimal. In addition, I plan to share some ideas that have enabled us to encourage teachers and students to open the lines of communication between teachers' expectations and students' needs.



As I tutor, I perpetually ask myself: "In addition to meeting teacher demands, how can I get the students I work with to see writing as something more than a dull or threatening assignment to be dreaded, finished, and forgotten about? How can I encourage each student to find more value in the struggle they must go through to produce meaningful composition?" Because there are so many teachers with varying agendas and even more students who, over the years, have been conditioned to please the teacher, there are no simple answers. I think these questions resonate in my mind because I'm a student who has written many papers simply to meet teacher expectations in order to do well. This realization has caused me to become a firm believer that this cycle of "going through the motions" solely to please the teacher needs to be broken. There has got to be something more to it... otherwise the whole experience can seem like a farce in that your writing reflects discipline but no real thinking. But working with students at the Writing Center has shown me that this de-programming process is extremely complicated, especially when students are writing papers for teachers whose stifling standards go against everything we stand for at the Writing Center. Yet the students aren't as frustrated about having to go through the motions as they are about figuring out what it takes to please the teacher. Therefore, sometimes we seem to be fighting an uphill battle.

"...the students aren't as frustrated about having to go through the motions as they are about figuring out what it takes to please the teacher."

And so this is the overall paradox that I face as a well-intentioned writing tutor: I'm caught between wanting to help students please their teachers so they will do well while also looking for ways to ensure that students are finding value in their writing. This multi-lensed vantage point from which I gaze has enabled me to become more familiar with the unspoken tension that exists between teachers and students when it comes to doing writing assignments. It seems that students, for

"In the Middle..." continued

various reasons, are often intimidated to seek the teacher out in order to clarify expectations and communicate needs. On the other hand, teachers rarely if ever get to hear the behind-the-scenes chatter that is generated within the tutoring cubicle. And so the Writing Center tutors frequently take on the role of "allies" in that we listen to their ideas and concerns and try our best to advise them with little or no input from the teacher. Now although it is important to students that we are their "allies," I contend that there is a need for more public discourse between teachers and students about this underlying tension. Perhaps then students would find more value in their experiences with writing in college, and teachers and tutors would gain a greater sense of purpose concerning their professions.

So how can we as tutors go about provoking this public discourse? At Montclair State University, the Writing Center's community of graduate assistants has begun to earnestly encourage students to talk with their teachers, for the main reason that it is a healthier situation than trying to dance around unclear or intimidating expectations. It also provides us with more to work with as we try to meet our multi-faceted goals.

There are three additional ideas that we have developed to encourage communication between teachers and students. For one, we've created a triplicate form that enables the teacher, tutor and student to remain in the loop; a portion of the form is devoted to "teacher response" so tutors can gain some insight as to teachers' expectations. Next, we presented on this issue at a conference held at Montclair State, and I expounded upon our main ideas at a recent conference held at Merrimack College. At both events, the audience was comprised of both faculty and students, which allowed us to bring our concerns to a larger forum. And the discussion it prompted was provocative, eye-opening and necessary. Thirdly, we have arranged visits into virtually every basic and freshman composition classroom; at this time we explain our philosophy and engage in a dialogue with teachers and students about the pressures and purposes of writing in academic life as well as writing in general.

On a personal note, in addition to my work as a tutor, I can see how I have become an even more flexible and accessible composition instructor. Yes, I have challenging standards for my students and I go to great lengths to communicate clearly, but I want my students to feel comfortable to approach me. I encourage them to candidly discuss anything they are confused about and to tell me their needs. Perhaps, if these real issues our students are facing in the composition classroom are heard and responded to by faculty, students and tutors, Writing Center tutors would not be looked at just as allies but facilitators. Further, students will find more value in their writing, and teachers would reflect upon and re-evaluate the types of expectations they are placing upon their students. ☼

Did you know...

The name "Dangling Modifier" is a controversial one. When discussed at the NCPTW in 1994, most writing center directors felt it was a terrible title because they thought "people would think it focused on the mechanics of writing," said Ron Maxwell, Penn State University's former writing center director. The title was voted on and maintained as a collaborative decision in a staff meeting at Penn State in 1994.

The tutors involved "unpacked" the phrase "Dangling Modifier." Not only was the title a play on words, but it also stood for something more communicative and progressive. Maxwell explained that "Modifier" implied the students' desire to help other students modify their writing. "Dangling" referred to the students' roles in the hierarchy of the university, as they were only in the school for a short amount of time relative to the faculty and staff.

The concern with this "terrible title" as some called it, was that it may have been affecting the publication's reputation. "If writing center directors opposed the name, might they be discouraging students from contributing?" asks Maxwell.

Creating Teachers, Changing Masks: From the Writing Center to the Classroom

Presented by Stephanie Harm, Carissa Jones, Becky Shovan, and Lindsay Swanson of Central Michigan University at the 16th Annual National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing at Penn State University

Elizabeth Blakburn Brockman and Cassie Taber

At the CMU Writing Center, many consultants are English education majors, so they understandably ask this question about their WC experience: is it preparing us for our future classrooms? In response to this question, these consultants organized a 1999 NCPTW panel comprised of four WC consultants, a composition methods professor, and a field experienced coordinator. At the conference session, panelists and participants discussed six WC scenarios to learn ways WC experiences might be applicable to future teaching careers. Although WC work can't theoretically recreate classroom settings, in discussing the student-consultant scenarios, we found some important lessons consultants could take from the WC into their future middle and high school classrooms:

- Facilitating Topic Selection. When students select clichéd paper topics that are also too broad, use a WC approach. Ask students open-ended questions about topic choices and then guide them towards global revision so topics are more original and papers more focused.
- Managing "Trouble Makers." Don't stress out about classroom management. Be confident instead! After all, as WC consultants, we have had vast experience working with all kinds of students, including those who are difficult or even resentful.
- Fostering Self-Confidence. When students say they are terrible writers, practice WC strategies. Read the students' documents from introduction to conclusion and then focus on the positive. Highlight and celebrate, for example, the rhetorical features or paper sections that show great promise or are already successful.

- Teaching Disabled Students. When disabled students are enrolled in classes, don't be afraid to use different strategies and resources, even those which might not seem standard. Of all the approaches, though, consider engaging students in WC-type conversation. Dialogue in the classroom is a means to the end.
- Clarifying Plagiarism Standards. By tutoring ESL students in a university WC, many consultants know plagiarism rules are not universal. As a result, don't assume all students value or even know standards for academic integrity. Be explicit.
- Promoting Cultural Diversity. When students from different cultures struggle with assignments, a one on one conference reminiscent of WCs may reveal that the assignment (or some features of it) is culturally biased. Transform this epiphany into a "teachable moment" for the entire class. Consider advising the assignment so that all students learn to recognize and value the perspectives of other cultures.

These WCs and classrooms connections aren't surprising. After all, the ultimate goal for each WC consultant and composition teacher is identical: to help individual students become stronger, more confident writers.

Note:

We are grateful to Dr. Mary Ann Crawford, who directs the CMU Writing Center, for her guidance in this project. We also thank Becky Shovan. Becky initially proposed the scenario format for the National Conference and later served as the CMU liaison for *The Dangling Modifier* editorial staff. ☼

Ron Maxwell Award Winners 1999 and 2000

The NCPTW Ron Maxwell Award is for Distinguished Leadership in Promoting the Collaborative Learning Practices of Peer Tutors in Writing. The award recognizes an individual for dedication to and leadership in collaborative learning in writing centers, for aiding students in together taking on more responsibility for their learning, ultimately, for promoting the work of peer tutors. Its presentation also denotes extraordinary service to the evolution of the NCPTW.

1999 – Molly Wingate, Writing Center Director at Colorado College

As one nominator wrote, "I think the only and obvious choice for this award is Molly Wingate, who has twice kept the conference going by the heroic measure of sponsoring it. Molly has been the spirit of service—a model in working collaboratively with her own students, a model in collaborating with the rest of us, and a joy to work with in her unending kindness, courtesy, and enthusiasm. Moreover, Molly has been a constant source of support to other programs, floundering Centers, [and] desperate directors.... I can't imagine this organization without Molly."

Upcoming Events

18th and 19th Annual National Conferences on Peer Tutoring in Writing

The 18th Annual NCPTW, 2001
Theme: Writing From the Center
Hosted by: Muhlenberg College, Lafayette College, Lehigh University, and Moravian College
Location: Allentown, PA
Date: November 2-4, 2001
Proposal Deadline: April 16, 2001
Contact: Linda Miller, lmiller@muhlenberg.edu

The 19th Annual NCPTW, 2002
Hosted by: University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas
More information when available

For online information, visit:
http://www.chss.iup.edu/wc/ncptw

2000 – Jean Kiedaisch, Director of the Academic Support Programs at University of Vermont

Jean has been part of the conference from the outset—she brought peer tutors to the first one in 1984. She co-hosted the conference in 1991, not because the University of Vermont couldn't sponsor the conference itself but rather an attempt to widen the circle of collaborative practice. She has offered counsel as part of the conference steering committee for many years. A collaborative learning philosophy guides her work on her campus and in her discipline, even as it informs her conference presentations and those of her tutors. What she practices among her peer tutors she also practices among her professional colleagues. As letters of nomination noted, "Her passion for peer tutors shines through her work." She leads "quietly" and with an "unflappable manner." "I've always felt that she was ready to lend a hand, even when she was unable to attend the conference." "She has shared her ideas freely."

Congratulations
to Molly
Wingate
and Jean
Kiedaisch

The Dangling Doodlers' Page

```
K D U F B D K J A L K F N V L
K J F D G H F J A S D H A S D
T V T U T O R H B R U F F E E
D E H R Y C L A R I T Y H A V
I R R E L B M U M Z T A O U A
C C O N T A C T R E P O R T L
T C G A T E M A N I N C R H U
I S O L S E A T W A L N E O A
O I L M I N E R V O U S T R T
N I B X M R A M M A R G I S I
A N A R R A T I V E L P R H O
R L S N O I T A T I C P W I N
Y R E C E P T I O N I S T P W
J A M L E M E P S J F H T R U
M K A N D B O O R O T M S N H
A S K J D H M E M O O K A J A
N D C O W S M U N C H F I R N
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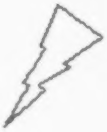
BRAIN STUMPIN' SEARCH -A- WORD



Word Box

- tutor
- dictionary
- mumbler
- grammar
- citations
- nametag
- nervous
- seat
- writer
- narrative
- evaluation
- contact
- report
- receptionist
- clarity
- comma
- bruffee
- authorship

Directions:
Find the words in the word box. They can be forward, backward, up, down, and diagonal.

Cryptogram

Tutoring Inspiration—
Confucius says...

LVMX Z SZC Z JVPO, ZCN

OX DVBB XZH JRQ RCX NZF.

HXZEO Z SZC HR DQVHX,

ZCN OX DVBB GQRAZABF

PXCN FRW HOZCI-FRW

BXHHXQP JRQ HOX JVPO.

Hint: Z=a & X=e

Stumped?

The Cryptogram Answer:

Give a man fish, and he will eat for one day. Teach a man to write, and he will probably send you thank-you letters for the fish.

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The Dangling Modifier

Volume 8 Number 1 A national newsletter by and for peer tutors in writing, produced in association with the NCPTW Fall Issue 2001

Mission Statement

The mission statement of *The Dangling Modifier* is to provide a national forum for ongoing conversation among peer tutors in writing. *The Dangling Modifier* is designed to stimulate discussion, promote national peer tutor activities, and share helpful information among writing centers across the nation. The editorial staff strives to select pieces that are interesting, controversial, original and well-written.

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At the Center of the 2001 NCPTW

By Alex Doehrer and Maggie Herb, Writing Tutors at The Pennsylvania State University

The 18th Annual National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing was held this year on November 2-4, at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

Tutors, directors, writers and teachers from across the country came together to make the weekend, full of discussions, presentations and collaboration, a rousing success.

With an overall theme of "Writing from the Center," the conference gave attendees the opportunity to participate in a variety of discussions regarding the different ways, both literal and figurative, that writing serves as our "center."

The conference offered over sixty presentations, with topics ranging from tutoring reluctant writers to issues of authorship to a writing center's atmosphere, giving attendees a wide array of choices to explore.

Some presentations were full, allowing presenters to share their expertise with many; others attracted smaller numbers, giving both presenters and audiences the opportunity for small-group discussions and collaboration. No matter what format or topic attendees preferred, a presentation was certain to suit their interests.

A high point for many was the Saturday afternoon keynote address by Scott Russell Sanders, noted essayist, author and Distinguished Professor of English at Indiana University. After Saturday afternoon's presentations ended, attendees came together in Egner Chapel to listen to Sanders (whose metaphor "writing from the center" provided the theme for the conference) speak about his own writing processes which help him to explore the evolution of memories and perception. In the talk, entitled "Wild Words," Sanders shared personal stories and gave examples from his own work to illustrate his thoughts on the writing process.

In addition to the consideration that went into the keynote speaker and the numerous presentations, conference planners also ensured that participants had opportunities to socialize with peers and colleagues. Friday evening's gathering in The Hoffman House offered beverages and snacks while participants registered and mingled; Saturday evening featured a buffet dinner, a live jazz quartet and a book fair, featuring work by Sanders and a number of other writing references and resource books.

Thanks to all—planners, organizers, presenters and participants—who made this year's conference so rewarding and enjoyable. We hope to see you all next year in Kansas! X

From *The Dangling Modifier* Staff:

Dear Readers,

We would like to welcome you to the first ever online issue of *The Dangling Modifier*! Although our format has changed, our mission to provide a national forum for peer tutors in writing remains the same. Featured in this issue are perspectives from attendees of the 2001 NCPTW, as well as several articles dealing with the different roles we take on as tutors. We hope that our new online format will encourage more reader feedback and interaction, so your reactions to each issue are more than welcome. What did you like about the 2001 NCPTW? Does your writing center have a mascot? How do you see your role as a tutor? We can't wait to hear from you!

NCPTW: Idealism in Action

By Rose Hurder, Writing Center Tutor at Millsaps College, Jackson, Mississippi

hree days. Thirteen hours. That was all the time I spent at the 2001 National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing. Yet rarely do I get as much out of a semester of school as I did from this one conference. It's hard to adequately describe what exactly made the conference so exceptional. I enjoyed presenting. I enjoyed the exchange of ideas that occurred in all of the sessions. I even enjoyed the food. Yet there was more to the weekend than any of these aspects. What truly made this conference special was the sense of community that immediately enveloped us all. We were idealists united by the thrill of participating in something we could be proud of.

"I have decided that writing centers are utopian ideas put into action."

I have decided that writing centers are utopian ideas put into action. Where else is something so egalitarian as a writing center? Or are people as respectful of one another's ideas? And, based on everything I have seen, these ideals work. I could see this zeal that comes from knowing you are a part of something good on countless faces. Why else would Ron Maxwell, the former director of the Penn State Writing Center, come back to these conferences year after year, even in his retirement? Or Monica Stufft forego sessions to taxi us to and from the hotel? Their amazing dedication reflects the way I feel about writing centers.

Before this conference, I did not realize why I enjoyed tutoring so much. Yet the more people I met, the more I began to understand. Nobody I met had a negative attitude. The exchange of ideas taking place was phenomenal. We were not competing; we were working together. And I kept meeting people who loved what they did. This conference demonstrated what makes writing centers so special. It brought together a group of people who love their jobs because they understand what it means to help others in a way that promotes individuality, equality, and the most powerful form of communication. Not bad for a weekend event. X

2001 Ron Maxwell Award Winner

By Alex Doehrer

Congratulations to Dr. Kevin Davis, the Writing Center director at East Central University in Oklahoma, for winning the Ron Maxwell Award at the 2001 NCPTW, with its theme "Writing from the Center". "Whatever I write—essays, poetry, scholarship—I spin off of my personal experience to try to create a larger meaning which extends to the reader," said Dr. Davis, the director of the East Central University Writing Center since 1987. "A good day is when I go to the Writing Center by choice, not by necessity. A good day is when I get lots of phone calls with questions but none with urgent requests. A good day is when the tutors are running the show and I'm just the resource guy who works in the background."

The NCPTW Ron Maxwell Award, which is endowed by Ron and Mary Maxwell and includes a plaque and a modest cash prize for the recipient, is awarded for distinguished leadership in promoting the collaborative learning practices of peer tutoring in writing. Dr. Davis has "always had a clear vision of what this conference is and can be," said Jean Kiedaisch, Director of the Academic Support Programs at University of Vermont and the 2000 Ron Maxwell Award Winner.

Dr. Davis has been married to his "college sweetheart and good friend," Annie, for twenty-eight years. He has two children: Kirsten, a manager for the Oregon State University book store, and Nathan, "who recently retired from a lucrative insurance career to return to college in hopes of fulfilling his childhood dream of becoming a doctor," said Dr. Davis. At some point, each of them worked for him as peer tutors.

Described by one nominator as "fair-minded and honest", Davis received his B.A. and M.A. degrees from Southeast Missouri State and his Ph.D. in composition and rhetoric from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. He hosted the NCPTW in 1995 and 1996.

"Ron Maxwell is the person I want to be when I grow up," said Dr. Davis. "His quiet demeanor and his calm, easy-going control are all things I wish I was better at. To receive an award named after him is an honor which I really don't feel worthy of." X

Not Just Talking: Opportunities for Learning and Change

By Scott Johnston, Director of Composition at State University of New York at Fredonia

Listening to "Partnership with Struggling Writers: Case Studies," given by three undergraduate presenters after my own talk, I was reminded why The National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing is not only a place to share our research, but also a powerful vehicle for genuine change in the academe. The term "life-long learner" has become so overused, it is nearly meaningless, nothing more than a cliché. However, the concept itself is imperative for effective tutors and teachers, and I am glad to report that I learned a great deal during the conference. I was particularly impressed with the undergraduate tutors' insights and ideas, as well as their enthusiasm and dedication. For instance, Anne Schober demonstrated how she responds to students' writing using sticky notes rather than writing on the papers themselves. She does this because her students had explained how their writing felt like it became the teacher's writing when the teacher wrote in the margins. After more than fifteen years working in writing centers, I had never heard this suggested, though it is clearly an effective method for maintaining student ownership.

Currently, I am the Director of Composition at SUNY Fredonia, and in this capacity, I often share ideas for the instructors to consider. The day after I returned from the conference, I posted the idea on our composition listserv. A number of instructors have already adopted it, and others tell me they are going to experiment with it. Clearly, this constitutes change that will positively affect many students for years to come.

During the final of the three presentations, it suddenly dawned on me that each of the case studies the tutors so eloquently described, as well as the research I have conducted, had a fundamental similarity that was applicable to writers at all levels of education. In fact, I suspect this similarity may well be the most essential element in the success or failure students have with their writing. It is simply this: typical students, at most levels of education, do not see themselves as writers, regardless of the quality and quantity of the writing they do in school. Ironically, I also know from my research and experience in schools that students in kindergarten often consider themselves writers. Though I would be very interested in exploring the reasons why this shift in perception occurs, I decided it would be equally worthwhile to begin researching to what extent students at my institution conceive of themselves as writers and how this may influence the way in which they write and the quality of the work they produce. I have already created and distributed a writing attitudes survey to several English classes and plan to have students from courses all over the college take it next semester. Hopefully I will be sharing this information, along with some implications for tutoring and teaching writing, at next year's NCPTW.

If Kenneth Bruffee and L.S. Vygotsky are correct when they argue that we think in ways that we learn to talk, and that all talking begins with social interaction, then conferences like the NCPTW are crucial for tutors, teachers, and the students with whom we engage in conversation. As long as we continue to talk with one another, share our ideas, and then incorporate what we learn in our own tutoring and training, we will truly be life-long learners. X

Making Connections

By Lee Ann Diffendal, Peer Tutor in Writing at University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown

When I first became a peer tutor, I remember being anxious about whether I could aptly criticize a peer's work and assume a teacher-like position. In actuality, my concerns were a result of having a vague understanding of what constitutes a tutor's role—something that is imperative for tutors to know.

Originally, I assumed a tutor's role was to serve as a replacement professor who has the ability to break lectures down to a level any writer can comprehend. Truthfully, a peer tutor does not act in lieu of a professor nor should a tutoring session function as a make-up class for the student. Rather, a student should consult a tutor to gain assistance with his or her writing after the student has already attempted to understand the material on his or her own. As a writing tutor, I have encountered students who exhibit a below average writing level, and they unrealistically expect me to transform them into an author of Hemingway's caliber in a twenty minute session. Other students have given me their papers to review for grammatical errors.

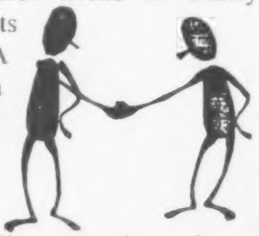
> ***"A tutoring session is a constant give and take process in which no hierarchy of power should occur."***

Yet we must be mindful that a peer tutor cannot turn an "F" paper into an "A" paper. A writing tutor does not necessarily construct well-written papers by writing students' thesis statements or developing main points for them. Instead, a tutor should help his or her students to improve their understanding of issues involved in writing, such as developing a thesis statement or creating transitions, and then encourage them to apply this knowledge on their own.

In addition, students should not expect a writing tutor to simply proofread or edit their papers. In fact, tutors should initially discuss other aspects, including the organization and structure of papers with their students, rather than grammar. After all, one must build the foundation of a house before painting it. Just as students need to recognize they are responsible for their own academic performance, the tutor should help the student to gain a crystal clear understanding of this relationship. A tutor and a writer have a reciprocal relationship; a tutoring session is a constant give and take process in which no hierarchy of power should occur—an even playing field between two peers.

Another difficulty I have experienced concerns maintaining a professional relationship with students outside of tutoring sessions. For instance, if I would see a tutee I had worked with at a social gathering, I would feel compelled to approach him or her because I felt we had formed a bond during our sessions. However, when one of the students began procrastinating in writing a paper until she had first consulted me, I learned that tutoring does not necessarily equal bonding. A student can easily become dependent on a tutor, and this dependency can hinder a student's learning process. I now take this belief seriously , as I will go so far as to decline offers from a student to get together outside of a tutoring session.

Consequently, I have learned that a fine line exists between tutors and writers during a tutorial. The session should not resemble a class in which one will find a distinct separation of power between an authoritarian teacher and a subordinate student. However, when students begin to take advantage of this mutual situation, the tutor needs to clarify boundaries that both the students and the tutor should respect. A tutor is analogous to a consultant and not necessarily a friend or a comfort zone. The foremost role a tutor plays is one of many academic resources a student may utilize to gain a better understanding of certain material. X



A SERVICE TO STUDENTS, A SERVICE TO MYSELF

BY JESSICA TRENCHICK, PEER WRITING CONSULTANT AT COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

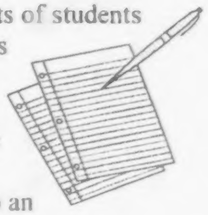
I live for clothes. If shopping is a sport, then I am a hunter. I would even major in pop culture if I could. So how do I relate my passion for trendiness to my undergrad studies in English? Well, when people ask me what I want to do when I grow up, I tell them, "I want to be editor of a magazine like Cosmo." Relating this goal to my work as a peer writing consultant at the Columbus State University Writing Center might seem a bit more challenging, but these interests surprisingly complement each other quite well. Although I am a peer writing consultant, I also serve as an editor.

I use the word 'editor' in a broad sense: a person who reflects on a written piece as a whole and addresses its global issues by assessing its quality, not just a proofreader armed with a red pen. In my opinion, being a skilled editor means not only realizing when a particular piece needs improvement, but also acknowledging patterns of errors and recognizing how to make the writing better. Every time I work in the Writing Center, I am helping people to discover weaknesses in their writing and to develop techniques enabling them to overcome these problems. After all, a successful editor needs to possess critical reading skills to effectively evaluate an article or paper.

"As students gain assistance with the writing process, I attain valuable experience as a critical reader."

Through my discourse with the students who come into the Writing Center, I am constantly developing and refining my ability to read critically. And if one can define critical reading as the ability to not only recognize problems in writing, but also to understand what causes these errors and how to explain them to the writer, then I would argue that this definition could serve as my job description. Thus, with each student essay I read, I am one small step closer to my personal goal of becoming an editor.

Of course, this process works both ways. As I learn to recognize weaknesses in writing, I am also learning to recognize strengths. Almost on a daily basis, I find myself praising the efforts of students in the Writing Center with comments such as, "I like this transition because it…" or "This is a strong conclusion because you…" I believe an understanding of coherent writing should be just as important to an editor as the ability to recognize mistakes.



This recent personal revelation has led me to value my work in the Writing Center as more than just a paycheck. Peer writing consultation does not just provide a service to my fellow students, but an advantage to myself as well. Our own writing center has a slogan we include in all of our advertising: "Better writers make better papers." In applying this motto to my goals, I feel that better peer writing consultants make better editors. X

Want to See your Name in Lights?

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Learning Not to Be the Boss

By Mercy Greenwald, Writing Consultant at Coe College, Grand Rapids, Iowa

I can still distinctly remember my first shift at the Writing Center. Torrents of questions filled my head. "What do I do if I get a conference?" "What am I going to say?" "What am I going to do?" "What happens if everyone thinks I'm a total fraud?"

Needless to say, I was a bit nervous. Fortunately I had my first conference with a fellow consultant. We reviewed a paper for her art appreciation seminar. Even though I cannot remember anything we discussed during the entire conference, I can recall that when the conference ended I thought to myself, "Hey, that wasn't too bad. Maybe I can actually do this." After conferencing hundreds of times, I would like to think I am a little better now in handling these sessions. Although I am not really sure if I have improved much since that first conference, I do understand that the process of learning how to conference is something that continually changes and grows with me. Collaborating with writers is an evolutionary process that is full of challenges and learning experiences. There is no "perfect" way to do a conference, and there is no such thing as getting so good at conferencing that no more room exists for improvement. This is probably the most important element of conferencing I have learned since I started working here three years ago, and I think this realization has contributed to my evolution as a consultant.

When I read through the database, looking over all the different conferences in which I have participated during my time here, I could easily discern between the conferences I had my first year and the ones I have had more recently. During my first year, I felt uncertain about how I should initiate a discussion. I tended to package my conferences for the first few weeks by using a recurrent pattern of semi-small talk, discussion of the paper, finding errors, discussing them, and saying goodbye. As I became more comfortable with conferencing, I also became more assertive. I went into more depth with ideas and concepts, and writers often responded positively to this change.

In the latter part of my first year in the Writing Center, I became aware that I served a real purpose in conferences. I realized that I function as a 'positive reinforcer' for the writers. During the spring term of my first year, I worked individually with two different first year students who were in the same English class. They were both really dissatisfied with the course and were getting grades that did not please them. Their generally positive attitudes instantly changed the moment they started talking about their writing in this class. They felt frustrated and angry about their writing and the way in which the professor perceived their writing abilities. We worked together for the majority of the semester, and by the end of the year their grades had improved immensely. At first, I thought that this boost in grades occurred because I had helped them learn how to write better papers. However, the more I think about it, the more I realize these students achieved higher grades because of our combined efforts.

My purpose in helping those students mainly involved giving them the chance to trust in their own abilities, rather than imparting any sort of knowledge on them that they did not already have. I serve in multiple roles as a soundboard, a counselor, and a support system for these students, and for any student who visits. I do not teach the people who seek assistance with their papers, but rather learn from them. My desire to learn from the writer who I conference helps the individual improve his or her writing; every writing consultant should foster confidence in writing. As consultants, we can correct grammar or fix mistakes, but these actions will only change a few papers and will never actually improve the writer's skills.

Reflecting on my past three years of working in the Writing Center has given me the ability to really analyze and understand the ways in which I work with a writer who requests help with a paper. We need to understand, as writing consultants, that much of what we do is centered in validation. We help people to recognize that they already possess the ability to write well. Although we can help writers with some of the formalities and support them in any way they need, they are the only ones who have the necessary element of any good paper—a story. I think our job can be much easier than we think, but the hardest part concerns making *ourselves* aware of this. Gaining that understanding has changed the way I have conferenced between my freshman and senior years. X

The Need For Mascots in Writing Centers

By Aaron Rider, Peer Tutor at Pittsburg State Writing Center, Pittsburg, Kansas

Mascots are an essential part of any organization. They help to create a group identity and to promote public recognition. At the Pittsburg State Writing Center, we rely on meerkats to bring us together as a working team. I think that adopting a mascot is very appropriate for many different reasons, such as motivating people to do their best and providing unity in a group.

We searched far and wide to find the meerkat. This animal lives in the southern part of Africa, which consists mostly of the Kalahari Desert. With the exception of their black-banded eyes, adult meerkats closely resemble Prairie Dogs with their shorts legs and long, thin bodies.

The Smithsonian poster that graces one of our walls states that the meerkat's "survival depends on their incredibly communal society." In addition, meerkats are extremely sociable, much like the tutors in our writing center. We not only want to help our fellow comrades by reading their papers and expressing new ideas, but we also strive to create comfortable, casual friendships that extend beyond the walls of our writing center.

Another way in which our writing center relates to a group of meerkats concerns how meerkats band together to create more protection in times of danger or trouble. By banding together, meerkats have the increased ability to thwart dangerous predators. During busy times in the Writing Center, a tutor who is studying or sitting in the hall will chip in and help those tutors who are currently working. While we do not scare away our visitors, we do band together to create unity and defuse a difficult situation.

One final characteristic our writing center has in common with a group of meerkats focuses on how an older one will help to raise the young by helping them forage for food and watching for danger. Our director, Professor John Franklin, is much like this elder meerkat. He takes on the responsibility of training new tutors in making sure they are prepared to give writers the best advice they possibly can. He has reassured us many times that if we have a problem we cannot solve, we should just let him know, and he will assist us with it. This mutual cooperation enables our writing center to run smoothly.

Overall, I think tutors and professors should consider the benefits of incorporating a mascot into their writing centers. A common mascot helps to promote unity and to maintain a stronger focus on our goals as tutors. I highly encourage any writing center that does not already have a mascot, emblem, or logo to consider adopting one. X

What's in a Name? You Tell Us!

What is meant by the name "Dangling Modifier"? The philosophy behind the newsletter's name, which was originally created by students, is quite fascinating. Although the name implies a grammatical concept, it actually serves a deeper and more meaningful literary purpose. Interestingly, "dangling" originally referred to the students' roles in the university's hierarchy, as they were only part of the university for a short while in relation to the faculty and staff. "Modifier" referred to the students' willingness to modify other students' writing. Thus, the name was deemed suitable for its audience—peer tutors—and its purpose—to promote discussion and collaboration among peer tutors in writing.

While the name's original meaning may have appeared somewhat clever, some readers feel that the newsletter's name, *The Dangling Modifier*, should be revised, or ultimately eliminated. They feel as though the name represents a weak attempt at a literary pun, as well as an apparent focus on mechanics. How do you feel? We would love to hear some of your ideas. If you have any creative and appropriate suggestions for a newsletter name change, please contact us via mail or e-mail. We would certainly appreciate your responses!

Tutor Guru Says…

Experiencing any problems in peer tutoring or writing? Ask the Tutor Guru for help! Write to danglingmodifier@psu.edu The Guru is always ready and willing to share his esteemed and insightful perspectives

DEAR TUTOR GURU,

PERHAPS IT'S JUST ME, BUT I FEEL AS THOUGH MY TUTEES ARE SUFFERING FROM ACUTE TWO HEADS-FOUR EYES PERCEPTION DISORDER. WHENEVER I POSE A THOUGHT-PROVOKING QUESTION, THEY SIT THERE SILENTLY AND STARE AT ME AS IF I WAS A FACE OUT OF ONE OF THEIR BAD DREAMS. ARE THEY AFRAID TO ANSWER FOR FEAR OF BEING WRONG? DO THEY SIMPLY NOT KNOW THE ANSWER? OR AM I JUST ASKING THE WRONG QUESTIONS? WHATEVER THE PROBLEM MAY BE, I AM IN DIRE NEED OF HELP! I DON'T WANT TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS FOR THEM, BUT I ALSO NO LONGER WANT TO ENDURE UNCOMFORTABLE SILENCES IN MY TUTORIALS. PLEASE HELP!

WILDA BEEST

Dear Ms. Beest,

As long as you really don't have two heads and four eyes, have no fear! Your tutee probably perceives you as a more fearful figure: a figure of authority. As long as you ask specific questions that pertain to the paper and remain non-directive, you can never ask a wrong question. The key to this solution is peer rapport. If you make the tutee feel comfortable at the beginning of your tutorial, you need not worry about awkward silences—your tutee will be more than ready to answer any questions you present.

Yours truly,
Tutor Guru

Dear Tutor Guru,

I recently had the pleasure to tutor an adult student. The tutorial was somewhat of a success. However, I cannot forget the initial tailspin my mind went through when realizing I had to tutor an "adult" student. I instantaneously doubted my abilities. Thus, my confidence plummeted, and in turn, my assertive presence was non-existent. How do I prevent this from occurring again? This mindset nearly destroyed the tutorial's effectiveness and disrupted its momentum. Please send some brainpower my way!

Frazzled in PA

Dear Frazzled,

Yes, having an older, perhaps wiser, tutee can be a bit intimidating, but you must remember that the adult is still a peer. As a peer tutor, your job is to create a peer relationship with other students—no matter how old they may be. Never forget that you are a trained helper in writing and that this student has come to you for help in writing, not lessons in life!

Yours truly,
Tutor Guru

The Dangling Doodlers' Page

Word Scramble

LARATCLOBIONO _____________

GIDNALGN EIFORMID ________ ________

FONERECNEC __________

MARGRAM _______

TRIGWIN SCORPSE _______ _______

NIBGROSAMRITN _____________

IVENIRSO ________

DEISA _____

Riddle

What is the longest word in the English language to have only one vowel?

Riddle

What English word consists of two letters, used three times each?

Cryptogram

Hint: Those are some fightin' words!

KAL BLR MF JMCAKMLAD

KANR KAL FTQDG

Clues: A=H, K=T, M=I

Stumped? Find the answers on our website.
http://www.ulc.psu.edu/Dangling_Modifier/answers.htm

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The Dangling Modifier

Staff Editorial

Article from *Volume 8, Number 2*

Staff Editorial

The Dangling Modifier Staff: Spring 2002

We are pleased to bring you our latest issue, which has a fun theme. In the spirit of collaboration with the NCPTW and the MWCA (and next year with the IWCA), we've included articles from writing center directors and tutors from across the world. On page five, there is an article about a writing centre in Hungary. Although they don't use peer tutors, what they do is similar, and we thought it interesting to show you what they do in other countries. We've also included some fun and informative articles as well as new Tutor Guru and Dangling Doodlers' pages.

You also might notice a few articles by our own staff. Since this newsletter strives to be at the forefront of writing center dialogue, let us be the next to say: KEEP TALKING! We solicited several times for manuscripts, both via email and at tutoring conferences, only to receive either few responses or silence. This is also the case with the National Peer Tutor Listserve which has been silent for months.

In the fall, a new staff will take our place to keep this newsletter going, so these are our last words as interns for *The Dangling Modifier*. Our editor Traci is graduating with a B.S. in Psychology and a minor in French. She plans to work for a year then go to graduate school for Health Psychology. Sara is graduating with a B.A. in English and is going to graduate school to attain a Master of Education in Curriculum and Teaching Instruction with Certification in English. Becky is graduating with a B.A. in English. Alex still has a year left before graduation (with dual majors in English and Philosophy). He is stepping down as managing editor so he can focus on classes, but he will contribute an article this fall about his experience at the NCPTW in Kansas and hopefully next year's Hershey conference. In the fall of 2003, he hopes to be in a MFA program for creative writing.

We're revealing ourselves to you in hope that you will share your writing selves to our audience. "Tutors finding creative ways to share who they are with other people—through poetry, through art, through music, through conversation, through writing—and by example encouraging other people—tutors, students, teachers—to share who they are as well," says Elizabeth Boquet. The point is to heat up the dialogue and turn the noise into a harmonious groove. We encourage you to submit articles about aspects of tutoring you find interesting. Thank you to everyone who contributed to this issue. As always, we would like to thank Penn State and the University Learning Centers for their support. Peace!

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Tutor Guru

Article from *Volume 8, Number 2*

Dear Tutor Guru:

I recently tutored a student who was working on a living will. A living will! I thought it was a big joke at first. I mean, what college student is concerned with a living will when he/she probably has an English paper due by the end of the week? So there I was, a 22-year-old tutor with little life experience and legal knowledge, attempting to analyze a will. In essence, I felt like an inflated ignoramus. I felt completely incapable of providing useful suggestions and credible opinions. Consequently, the tutee sensed my discomfort with the topic and thus responded to me in a condescending manner. I was humiliated, especially after asking most of the questions during the session rather than answering any of my tutee's questions. How can I prevent this catastrophe from happening again? Please help!

Sincerely, Igno Ramus

Dear Igno,

Ah, yes . . . the Guru can see why you felt discouraged. Tutoring an unfamiliar area of writing can be very trying on one's chi. But do not fear, my friend. In the continuous circle of tutoring, we tutors often learn more than the wisdom we impart to others. The Guru suggests that you do not view this situation as a failure, but as an endless collaborative learning process. No tutor, no matter how self-actualized, can ever prepare for all the possible types of writing existing on this diverse planet. For example, when a chemistry student requests your open-minded assistance with her equation-filled lab report, you will most likely face challenges in tutoring the assignment to your best ability. In future instances such as this, you may wish to consult a tutor friend who possesses an understanding of the particular subject or another individual who possesses many more years of life knowledge than yourself. Now, take a deep breath, and let yourself experience the phenomenon that is tutoring while the Guru meditates on this reflective issue.

Dear Tutor Guru,

The other day during my tutoring shift, I was exposed to an uncomfortable situation. After finishing up one session, I went to the computers to work with my next tutee when I was stopped in my tracks by the image on the computer screen. While he was waiting, the student had signed onto a website – one with a naked body. I felt my face turn red. I became very flustered. He quickly closed the website window when he heard me approach, but a fog of tension floated over our entire session. What is a tutor to do in an uncomfortable position like this?

Yours, Exxxtra Embarrassed

Dear Exxxtra,

Fortunately, the Guru has several alternatives for you to thoughtfully consider. If your aura has been damaged, the Guru advises you to kindly ask another tutor to take over your session and engage in a critical dialogue on the intricacies of the written English language with the curious student. Depending on how comfortable you feel, you could simply pretend that your eyes had been blind to the naked figure on the screen and freely offer insightful direction to the student. As another possibility, the Guru proposes you could openly communicate to the student what you observed and effectively move on with the session. These are only guides provided by the Guru, and they serve to grant you only a sample of the limitless answers in our vast universe of ideas. Rely on your heart to discover the solution that will peacefully comfort your soul, and you will attain the karma you desire.

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Articles

Article from *Volumê 8, Number 2*

A Glimpse of the Prairie: The 19th Annual NCPTW

By Brian Fallon, Undergraduate Writing Consultant at the University of Kansas

The University of Kansas, in collaboration with the 21st Annual Midwest Writing Centers Association Conference, cordially invites you to the 19th Annual National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing to be held at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, October 25--27, 2002. This year's planning has been unique since we have tried to bring together two groups, NCPTW and MWCA, that can benefit each other while increasing tutor involvement. This joint venture is meant to help keep the costs lower so all can enjoy the conference. Likewise, we realize that NCPTW has not occurred out west too often, and we wish to show you a good time while having an exciting and interesting conference with a high representation of peer tutors as they present on this year's theme: "learning with writing tutors."

What makes this conference different from others include its collaborative effort, the location, and a research fair, which is a new venue for presenters to strut their stuff! While having the same proposal criteria, the fair will be more graphic, and the researchers will be expected to explain their findings without giving a traditional presentation. This fair is specifically designed for sharing projects or research in progress, an interesting thesis or dissertation, or a new methodology for conducting research in writing centers. The research fair will allow conference goers to get a taste of everything versus having to choose between concurrent sessions that make people miss interesting topics. Those attending the conference can learn from writing tutor research from all over the country as they explore the fair. The intent is to affirm both undergraduate and graduate research in a new and intriguing environment. We hope to include over 50 presenters during this special session. The conference will be very focused on peer tutors, as it has been in the past, and we look forward to seeing what everyone has to offer.

This year's keynote speaker will be Elizabeth Boquet, Writing Center Director and associate professor of English at Fairfield University in Fairfield, Connecticut and author of the recently released book, *Noise From the Writing Center*. (For more on Boquet see page 3.) For entertainment, a local jazz combo will play at a Friday evening reception from 5-7 pm. Following the reception, we encourage our guests to discover historic downtown Lawrence. Visitors will have a number of restaurants and bars to choose from as well as movie theatres and live music. For a glimpse of Lawrence culture, check out www.Lawrence.com. Kansas City is only about 35 miles from Lawrence. For further information about lodging, transportation, local area information, and registration go to: www.writing.ku.edu/ncptw-mwca/.

Comment on this article.

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Articles

Article from *Volume 8, Number 2*

One Teacher's Approach

By John Harbord, Director of the Language Teaching Center of the Central European University, Budapest, Hungary

The Language Teaching Centre (writing centre) at Central European University (CEU) offers writing support in the form of tutorials (known as consultations) within the context of the university's academic English support programme. CEU is a graduate English language university of social sciences and humanities, most of whose students' first language is not English. These students have a high level of spoken language with TOEFL ranging from 550 to 670, but often have limited experience in formal writing and are working in an academic environment where they need to write academic papers and a master's thesis effectively in English at near-native speaker level. Consultations are combined with and follow from a more conventional course in graduate level academic writing. The Centre also has an extensive self-access website, (www.ceu.hu/ltc/sfaccess.html) which students are taught to use and encouraged to refer to in order to solve their writing problems.

Teacher-Student Approach

Our teacher-student approach differs significantly from the peer tutoring approach used in many universities in the United States. We do encourage students to work in consultation with a peer whenever possible and train them in techniques for peer evaluation and feedback, but the situation of our university does not allow students who receive even a partial stipend to be employed or paid for any work they do. Therefore, we cannot staff our centre with peer tutors. Instead, we are forced to opt for a professional, "expert" approach. While we are aware that we do not know the students' field as well as they do, we try to provide a high level of expertise in all aspects of writing and to apply techniques that will guide students to make their own improvements and changes in line with what they are trying to say. Our extensive experience (up to 35 half-hour consultations a week each at peak times over several years) provides us with an overview that makes our insights valid. The fact that we teach classes and give tutorials is also an advantage, as one and the same person sees the student's problems in class and deals with those in consultation. Similarly, seeing the students' problems in consultation allows us to adapt the content or pace of the class to suit the needs of the group.

In almost all cases, a student brings a draft of some pages of her own written work to a 30 minute meeting with a writing instructor with whom she has agreed to meet in advance. This draft is usually e-mailed to the instructor by attachment the day before the consultation. At the beginning of the year, when the students are new to the university, these texts will have been set as written tasks by the same instructor during the introductory writing course, but later they will be authentic pieces of academic writing such as research papers, critiques, statements of purpose or parts of a thesis. We accept both texts that are aimed at fulfilling the requirements of a student's degree (course assignments) and texts that are relevant to a student's future career or study (resumes, cover letters, statements of purpose). We are also willing to accept articles that students wish to publish.

It is very difficult beyond these basics to identify common approaches that all instructors use. In observing each other, we find that each of us uses a somewhat different range of techniques. I will describe how I work; it can be assumed that some of the things I do apply to my colleagues but that we do not all work in the same way. As my approach is more informed by experimentation and reflection than by reading books, I will also not offer any sources and theoretical bases for my way of working.

Consultation Format

I ask the student to begin the consultation by explaining the nature of the text, her purpose in writing, who she is writing for and her position on the subject. At this stage, I ask the student not to refer to or read from the text. In this way, I hope to get a global view of what the student thinks she is doing and to put her in the active role. Having seen the paper in advance, I can compare what I am told and what I see to what extent the oral explanation and the text are compatible. Based on this, I can suggest or agree with the student on an area or areas of focus. If this is a first consultation, the focus is likely to be very broad (structural examination); if it is a second consultation on the same paper, it will probably be more narrow (paragraph and sentence level examination). The student then reads aloud from her text the part or parts that have been agreed upon for discussion, some of which I may have highlighted during my reading for rapid reference during the consultation. I may interrupt during reading or wait till the end of a sentence or paragraph before intervening. I try to give feedback on the comprehensibility of the text and the student's success in achieving her desired aims, normally focusing on the area agreed with the student. However, I use my sensitivity if it becomes clear that the main problem lies elsewhere. I identify problems and elicit student self-correction or offer alternatives where the student is unable to self-correct. Finally, as a result of the interaction, the student goes away with a development focus to work on for the next consultation with the same or a different text.

Below, I have tried to identify some of the principal ways in which I, as a teacher, may intervene. In brackets I provide some examples of what I might say to the student in each case.

Eliciting
I ask the student to talk at length about the purpose, genre and audience of the text or a part of it. (So, tell me, what's this paper all about? Who's it for?)

Global meaning
I ask for the summary of a paragraph, usually to focus on a topic sentence or section. (So what is this paragraph about? What's the main idea?)

Use of sources
I ask the student to distinguish which ideas in the text are drawn from her research reading and which are drawn from her own analysis. (Whose idea is this? or Do we need a name in the text here?)

Linkage
I ask for clarification of how sentences, paragraphs, sections or ideas relate to each other. (What's the connection between this sentence and the next one?)

Audience/Info
I question the student's expectation of the reader's knowledge. (Do you think your reader knows this? Do you need to give a bit of background here?)

Incomprehension
I express incomprehension and ask the student to clarify. (I can't see what you're trying to say here. Can you explain?)

Rephrasing

I ask the students to rephrase an idea in simpler or more formal language. (This sentence is quite long and complex. Could you explain it to me simply? or Ok, how could you say that in a slightly more formal way?)

Questioning
I question the precise relationship between a word or a phrase and its intended meaning. (You used the word 'exacerbated' here. What exactly do you mean by that? or Can you give me a synonym for 'exacerbated'?)

Setting priorities
The student and I agree on goals for the next consultation. (Ok, so what do you want to work on between now and the next time I see you?)

All in all, given the limitations and possibilities of our special situation—professional writing consultations—we have developed a system that best meets our students' needs. I believe this writing support to be effective, and student feedback, both informal and formal, seems to suggest that it is.

Comment on this article.

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Article from *Volume 8, Number 2*

Learning To Help Students

By Lincoln Mitchell, Writing Consultant at Brigham Young University, Salt Lake City, Utah

I was very worried when I began my writing fellow career this semester because I didn't feel qualified. The writing fellow title carried a mystical quality, and I wasn't sure I belonged in that world. However, as time went by, I became more and more confident in my abilities. As a result, I started to get more and more out of being a peer tutor. In particular, I started to develop my own philosophy or system for peer tutoring. This philosophy is designed to help the students get the most out of the experience and hopefully get a good grade. As I worked with the students, I began to feel that there are several critical characteristics of a good tutoring experience, such as having a friendly relationship, having an individual approach, and setting clear expectations.

A friendly relationship with students is so important because they will not express their true concerns and feelings unless they feel comfortable. They are very worried I will think less of them after reading their papers. Therefore, students should know you are just like them, and that you are not there to judge them. After this type of relationship is established, the rest of the process becomes much easier.

Furthermore, each student needs to be treated individually. When I focus on tailoring my conference specifically for the individual, I find that both the student and I enjoy the conference and get more out of it. During my first few tutorials, I focused on outlining each paper's strengths and weaknesses, and this method resulted in different responses to each paper. However, as I gained more experience, I tried to focus on helping the students create unique and powerful arguments (which was what the professor wanted), but somewhere in this second process, I lost the individual focus. Perhaps I lost the individual focus because I was trying to improve the arguments by forcing my opinions on other people's papers. It seems like a simple thing to say -- that papers need to be considered individually -- but, in reality, falling into a pattern when responding to papers is easy. That's why we must remember our individual approach.

Finally, I think it is very important for students to have a clear understanding of what is expected of them. This is particularly important the second or third time students have their papers reviewed because students sometimes try to get away without putting their full effort into the rough drafts. In cases where the students visit multiple times, the shock of having someone else read their paper has worn off, and they are not so ashamed of the quality of their work anymore. They just come in with a very poor draft and expect the tutor to magically turn it into an "A" paper.

In order for the tutoring process to be more effective, students should feel comfortable, must receive individually tailored responses, and have and follow clear guidelines. If these criteria are met, I can magically help them turn their papers into ones that might get the grade they want.

Comment on this article.

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Article from *Volume 8, Number 2*

NCPTW and IWCA to Hold Joint Conference in 2003

By Ben Rafoth, Director of the Writing Center at Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Two national organizations for tutors and writing center directors will come together for the first time for a conference to be held October 23-25, 2003, in Hershey, Pennsylvania. Approximately 700 people are expected to attend. The International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) and the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing (NCPTW) will meet at the Hershey Lodge and Convention Center, located in Hershey (near Harrisburg). The conference will feature presentations by undergraduate and graduate student tutors as well as writing center directors from around the country and the world.

Anyone interested in tutoring, participating in writing centers, and the teaching of writing is invited to submit a proposal and to attend the conference. Undergraduate and graduate students who work as tutors in their college or university writing centers are especially encouraged to participate. Information about submitting a proposal, registering for the conference, and accommodations will be posted on the website as it becomes available.

The Hershey Lodge features a grand fireplace and college-like atmosphere, with all guest and meeting rooms in close proximity. There is a large indoor pool along with a whirlpool, sauna, fitness room, a game room. There are numerous dining and eating facilities in the Convention Center, which adjoins the Lodge. Walking and fitness trails are available too. Nearby fun includes Hershey Theme Park and Chocolate World. They will be open for the dates of our conference, and a get-together for conference attendees there is being planned. The conference planning committee includes Jon Olson, Michele Eodice, Harvey Kail, Paula Gillespie, Al DeCiccio, Marcy Trianosky, and Ben Rafoth (chair). For more information, visit: www.wc.iup.edu/2003conference or contact Ben Rafoth at: brafoth@iup.edu.

Comment on this article.

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Article from *Volume 8, Number 2*

Destroying Confidence with Crimson Strokes

By Tamara Simpson, Writing Tutor at Jacksonville University, Jacksonville, Florida

The professor passes a pile of papers to the first student in each row. As the papers make their way to the back of the room, faces drop and eyes roll. It's amazing how the fear and frustration of a minor writing assignment causes students to develop a fear of the written word. As tutors, our job is to alleviate that fear.

Unfortunately, the fear and discomfort with writing may begin at a young age. Take the movie A Christmas Story, for example—you know, the one where Ralphie wants the Red Ryder gun for Christmas. The teacher of Ralphie's English class announces a writing assignment, and all the students moan and whine. The night before the due day, they sit in their bedrooms, head in hands, and brainstorm ideas for their "themes." With good ideas, students (both in the movie and in real life) will become excited, and diligently write with amazing diction, great sentences, and fabulous content—or so they think. Their papers will return with crimson markings from front to back and an unpleasing grade written in forbidden red ink, surrounded with comments trashing the writer's masterpiece.

Students survive the difficult writing assignments and the forced plummet of their confidence through secondary school. Years later, they go to college; they come to us. Suddenly, papers are demanded in every class—essays, journals, reports. This anxiety of writing – this fear – cannot be escaped. Their faces drop, and their eyes roll. Sunken souls find themselves entering the infamous "Writing Center" and wondering what happens behind those doors. We hope that they leave with a diminished fear of writing.

Students sign in, grudgingly pass their papers across the table, and say, "Can you edit these changes for me?" My reply is a friendly one: "No. But you can read the paper to me and we can work on revision and editing techniques together." Their faces show utter confusion as if they had never heard the word "revision" before.

Reading their own papers aloud always awakens their fears, but with pen in hand, they begin to read and find mistakes on their own—not all of them of course, but some. As they read, I write comments on my blank sheet of paper. (I never write on their paper as that rekindles the fear of the bright red pen; in fact, I am always sure to not use red ink.) After they have finished reading, the ice is broken, and discussion commences. I offer suggestions like: "Your introduction should be captivating." "Tell a story; set a scene." "Grab your reader."

Slowly the students begin to nod as if understanding this foreign lingo of writing. They smile and seem pleased with themselves, and little by little, the image of red ink may be erased with our help. If we can achieve that goal, maybe, just maybe, writing becomes fun again.

Comment on this article.

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Article from *Volume 8, Number 2*

From Mrs. Pickle to The Writing Center: Inside the Mind of Soma Kedia

By Traci Frye

At Penn State's Writing Center, Soma Kedia shines as both a peer tutor and an enthusiastic leader. This ambitious English and psychology dual major and neuroscience minor has served as a dedicated tutor for nearly three years and as an innovative peer tutor co-coordinator during the past year. She specializes in tutoring personal statements and especially enjoys creative writing.

When asked how she has managed to stay motivated as a writing tutor, Soma replied, "It's the one student who actually wants to learn" that keeps her going. Seeing the lightbulb spark in a student's mind enables Soma to reconnect with her own enthusiasm for writing, which she has maintained since she was a young child. Even her email address, which contains her short story character mrs picKle, further demonstrates that Soma and her writing are inseparable. According to Soma, "Mrs. Pickle was the title of the very first short story I ever wrote when I was five years old, and I spelled it mrs picKle. The story was about how mrs picKle and her family 'exscaped' from the grocery store and got eaten . . . I think I was a very disturbed child."

In addition to her vivid imagination, her position as peer tutor co-coordinator has allowed her to not only use her leadership skills, but also to apply her creativity in The Writing Center and beyond. Some English faculty members at Penn State expressed a need for a workshop series in which tutors collaborate to develop and present workshops they think other students will find both interesting and beneficial. Soma quickly became involved with this project and then expanded it to include more participation and topic ideas from other tutors at The Writing Center.

These interactive workshops usually last about an hour and focus on various aspects of writing ranging from resumes and cover letters to grammar and citations. Workshops act as an intermediary between tutoring and classroom learning by granting students the tools they need to become more effective writers. According to Soma, "the [workshop] series is a concept to provide useful writing skills to the general PSU population." Most of the workshops are geared toward first-year students, and they often take place in a satellite location near the freshman residence area.

As for Soma's goals for the series, she hopes to provide a service for students to obtain help in areas where they most need it and have difficulty finding assistance elsewhere. Also, she wants to "help the general PSU public to be as excited about writing as we [tutors] are." The series provides increased publicity for the Writing Center as well.

Complementing her objectives for the workshop series, Soma also has set goals for other tutors and for herself. She would like to develop tutoring specialties among the staff in areas such as grammar, ESL, and learning disabilities. By tutoring a specific writing concern, tutors will be able to better help writers, and the writers will most likely demonstrate greater responsiveness to tutors. Like many tutors, Soma aspires to become more proficient in various phases of tutoring.

With her zealous determination for writing, Soma is able to spend many sleepless nights working on her ideas for the workshop series and The Writing Center. Soma's philosophy on tutoring and writing strongly parallels the viewpoint of Anne Lamott, who is recognized mostly for her book *Bird by Bird: Instructions on Writing and Life*, in which she asserts, "people tell me you can't teach writing. And I think, who are you, God's dean of admissions?"

Comment on this article

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Article from *Volume 8, Number 2*

Making Noise with Elizabeth Boquet

By Alex Doehrer

This year's Keynote Speaker at the 19th annual NCPTW will be Elizabeth Boquet, Writing Center Director and associate professor of English at Fairfield University in Fairfield, Connecticut for the past eight years and author of a new book, *Noise from the Writing Center*. Michelle Eodice, the Writing Center Director at the University of Kansas and this year's conference chair, first saw Boquet give a speech at NEWCA (Northeast Writing Center Association). "She introduced the idea of noise in her talk, using Jimi Hendrix as the example of how we can 're-tune' our guitars and amps to make new noises," said Eodice. "In the writing center, that noise might not be familiar or pleasant to our ears (at first), but it would certainly get our attention. I appreciated the creative way she led us to ask new questions about our practices."

Eodice chose Boquet as a keynote speaker for a few reasons. "I was predicting some real interest in her book. It will be a welcome conversation starter. A book that gets all the people in writing centers thinking and talking to each other," said Eodice. "Beth is dynamic as a person – a good thinker, a good listener and she is quite a good singer too. She values the stories of our daily practices and looks to illuminate the ideas we all bring to writing center work – making both theories and practices visible, lively and useful."

As a grad student at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Boquet helped to organize the NCPTW. "In a sense, NCPTW was the first professional conference I ever attended," said Boquet. The topic for her keynote address will follow the conference theme of 'Learning with Tutors.' "Over the past two years, I have been revising our writing center staff education course," said Boquet. "In the process, I have relied on tutors to help me retool the course. This year, two current tutors are team-teaching the course with me. So, for my talk, I will be focusing on some of what I have learned from teaching with them." Boquet received her B.A. in English at Nicholls State University, in Thibodaux, Louisiana, where she worked as an undergraduate tutor. She then went on to receive an M.A. in English (with an emphasis in linguistics) from the University of Southern Mississippi. And finally, she earned a Ph.D. in English (with an emphasis in rhetoric and linguistics) from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. "Writing centers were really the first place where I experienced what I consider to be critical unease in teaching and learning," said Boquet. "I never liked classrooms very much, even as a student, and I still don't. I had always been a solid, if relatively unengaged, student in the classroom; and it wasn't until I worked in a writing center that I really came to see how people learn and how they get taught and what the relationships between those two things might be…I liked working with students outside the boundaries of the traditional classroom."

Boquet is active in IWCA (International Writing Center Association) and will be the next co-editor (with Neal Lerner) of *Writing Center Journal*. "I am very excited about having the opportunity to serve as one of the editors, particularly because I wanted to find a way to give back some meaningful service to the writing center community," said Boquet.

Comments about Boquet's book include: "Her book offers a distinct perspective on writing center pedagogy by developing a theory of 'noise' and excess unique to the education of writers and tutors in the writing center. The work draws upon both academic and popular culture (including a chapter entitled 'Channeling Jimi Hendrix') and offers a sophisticated and provocative theoretical view that can benefit all writing center directors and tutors."

Boquet has lots of little goals for herself, including learning to play the guitar well enough to accompany herself and retiring someplace where it doesn't snow every year. "An overarching goal is to keep learning," said Boquet. "I think it's very important for teachers to challenge themselves as learners all the time. I think it's important for tutors to find fresh challenges in their work, and that's part of how I see my job as a writing center director—assessing strengths and weaknesses of individual tutors and finding challenges that allow them to work on their weaknesses and play to their strengths."

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Article from *Volume 8, Number 2*

Perpetual Disruptions: The Art of Pet Words

By Sara Kasper & Becky Zell

Have you met people who use the same word or phrase so often that their language becomes distracting? Did you ever wonder if that word reflects some aspect of their personality? We refer to these reoccurring words as *pet words*. As writing tutors, we see hundreds of written words in every session. Because the beginning of a session may be nerve-wracking and hurried, tutors can often feel more alienated from the tutee than a fellow peer should. Looking at word usage and patterns can provide significant insight into the personalities of those we tutor and will allow us to then form some type of bond with our tutee. To demonstrate this idea, two staff members from *The Dangling Modifier* have analyzed each other's words in relation to the other's personality.

Becky says...

Sara and I met in English 250, a training class for prospective writing tutors at Penn State. We are also staff members of *The Dangling Modifier*. Through these activities, I got to know Sara—and her writing—really well. I have noticed that her written and spoken language comments on her personality.

Sara often uses words such as "perhaps" and "though." These words of ambiguity reflect Sara's indecisiveness when making decisions. At times of uncertainty, she relies upon language; however, the language tends to represent her irresolute manner.

When asked about some of her favorite words, Sara lists "unadulterated" and "cosmopolitan." To the average listener, "unadulterated" sounds like a cousin of the word "adultery," an obvious evil. However, "unadulterated" really means pure. This incongruence suggests that Sara lives vicariously through the word, even though it has a distinctly different meaning than one would expect. Although Sara has lived in Pennsylvania her entire life, she manages to escape the mundane through "cosmopolitan." This word reflects a worldly, sophisticated lifestyle.

Sara says...

My fellow peer tutor in writing, Becky Zell, is a perfect subject for a pet word examination, for she is a fan of such transitional words as "however," "therefore," and "although." Could this imply that she likes change since she uses these transitional words quite frequently? Or could this imply that she despises change? Interestingly, her use of these transitions in writing defies her fear of transformation in reality.

They allow her to experience change without experiencing the real-life emotions associated with change. In essence, these words serve as exploratory tools: Becky may never fully embrace life alterations, but she may begin to appreciate them through her exploration of literary transitions. Furthermore, Becky enjoys the words "superfluous" and "perpetual." She thinks they are pretty sounding, which may mean she has a playful nature and thus enjoys experimenting with various words. And in fact, Becky, the same little girl who once loved to dress Barbie in her pretty pink outfits, is the same girl that loves to dress her papers with pretty, delicate words. Becky's preference for these graceful words indicates her composed and consistent personality.

In contrast, Becky—an athletic and adventurous girl—also prefers somewhat coarse and unsophisticated words such as "rampant" and "razzmatazz." Her inclination for these particular words suggests she is an energetic, audacious, and sassy individual who loves to challenge her limits. Indeed, Becky's partiality for such words mirrors her passion for life.

We say...

As we have displayed, it is very possible for a tutor to understand a tutee on a more personal level by simply examining a tutee's habitual word usages. After all, a tutee's pet words are probably being used for some reason, whether it is a subconscious attraction or a strong inclination for particular words. Either way, a tutor can possibly form valuable perceptions about a tutee's personality and thus better prepare him/herself for how to best interact with the tutee; this can only result in potentially powerful peer rapport. So be aware of your tutee's pet words so as to not only help yourself, but to remind your tutee that they—perpetual disruptions—can often generate rather distracting prose. All in all, the use of pet words is an art. And this art should be appreciated and applied to peer tutoring.

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- **This Issue's Staff:**

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Webmaster: Matt Hughes
Webmaster: Jason Cohen

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Staff Editorial

Article from *Volume 9, Number 1*

Staff Editorial

The Dangling Modifier: Fall 2002

We are pleased to present our Fall 2002 issue of *The Dangling Modifier*. Drawing upon our association with the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing (NCPTW), we bring you a conference summary written by our former managing editor Alex Doehrer, as well as an interview with this year's Ron Maxwell Award-winner Ben Rafoth by Kristin J. Smith, current managing editor. Along with our NCPTW coverage, our online publication includes articles on tutoring ESL grammar, the value of reading papers aloud, the importance of inquiry-based tutorials and more.

Our redesigned web page is perhaps the most visible change that the staff at *The Dangling Modifier* has made to the publication. We still publish excellent articles, the Tutor Guru advice column and Dangling Doodler's games. But along with our more sophisticated look, we have added a section for book reviews, archives and a message board. Our home page is available to any writing center that wants to provide a link to their website.

We are also proud to announce that both MLA International Bibliography, a humanities database containing reference work in the fields of literature, language, folklore and teaching, and ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, an online education information database, have added our publication to their databases.

This is an unusual semester for *The Dangling Modifier* because the entire staff is new. Kristin J. Smith, our current managing editor, will be graduating in December with a Bachelor of Arts in English. Tiffany Yanosky, our assistant managing editor this semester, will be assuming the managing editor position in the spring before she graduates with a Bachelor of Arts in sociology with minors in English and information systems and statistical analysis. Jason Cohen is one of our web masters, graphic designer, and tutor guru. He is working towards a bachelor's degree in English and a minor in technical writing. Stefanie Klevze, our public relations editor, is earning her bachelor's degree in English with minors in sociology and American studies. Matt Hughes, our other web master, is majoring in information sciences and technology. We would also like to thank our wonderful faculty-advisor Julie Story, associate director of Penn State's Undergraduate Writing Center, whose support and encouragement are unwavering. Everyone, except Kristin, will continue to work on *The Dangling Modifier* in the spring.

We hope that our publication will continue to thrive with the support of our readers, both nationally and internationally. Continue to share your experiences in tutoring writing in the form of articles, Tutor Guru questions, book reviews and participation in our message board. This is a forum for peer tutors in writing by peer tutors in writing, so keep contributing! Thanks for your support!

Comment on this article.

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The Dangling Modifier

Tutor Guru

Article from *Volume 9, Number1*

Dear Tutor Guru,

What do I do when my tutee and I come across the same mistake over and over again, but despite all of my efforts to help her/him see the mistake for her/himself, s/he continues to rely on me to point it out? My fingers are tired!

Pointing to Problems

Dear Pointing to Problems,

Contrary to what you may want to do, there are better responses than to keep working your fingers to the bone. It sounds to me like this writer just wants you to do the work, but if s/he truly doesn't understand the problem, then maybe you can work on it progressively. When you first see a problem, point it out, and explain it. The next time you see the same problem, point to it and ask him/her to tell you what the problem is. If s/he still doesn't catch on, mention that the two of you have run into this problem before. This helps the writer begin to recognize problems, which could ultimately lead to an independent writer. This should save your poor, callused fingers and help writers to learn!

The Guru

Dear Tutor Guru,

I am getting really frustrated with tutees that come in for extra credit but don't actually want to be tutored! How can I deal with these students?

Sick of Slackers

Dear Sick of Slackers,

You might feel like pulling out your hair, throwing papers, and yelling with frustration. Instead, because we must be civil, just take a deep breath and count to ten. First, it is important that the writers understand how a tutoring session ideally works so that they will know what is expected of them. As the session progresses, ask lots of questions, encouraging the writer to get involved. If s/he is still sitting there silently, explain that you can both sit there and waste the little time you have together, or s/he can try to participate and maybe, just maybe, learn something. I know this approach is a little aggressive, but no one is going to get anything out of the session if both people aren't actively engaged.

The Guru

Dear Tutor Guru,

I recently had a very uncomfortable tutoring situation. My tutee sat down to our session with tears in his eyes. His paper was about the death of his girlfriend; it had only been three months since she had passed away. I didn't ask him to read his paper aloud since he was visibly upset. But as I read his paper aloud, he started to cry. I asked him questions, pretending as if he wasn't crying. I didn't want to upset him any more by trying to comfort him. Did I do the right thing by trying to conduct the session even though he was upset? Or was I insensitive?

Sincerely,
Upset In Tutor Land

Dear Upset in Tutor Land,

Remember, we tutor our peers. Your reaction is a completely acceptable and normal human response. Maybe the writer just wanted another person to talk to. It is difficult to be faced with spontaneous emotions, especially those of strangers in the work environment. Next time consider the writer's feelings, at least at first, to establish a rapport. Subsequently, move onto tutoring. It will help the writer to understand that you care about him, thus making him feel more comfortable with you. If you are ever faced with a situation like this again, consider that even though you are a tutor, you are a person first. If you were really worried about the writer, you can refer him to a professional, but don't try to counsel the writer beyond writing. If he dismisses your help and focuses back on the work, then don't force it. Just remember, a little human kindness goes a long way.

The Guru

Dear Tutor Guru,

In a session I had the other day, a tutee was assigned to peer review another student's paper. I decided that I shouldn't help her because it was her actual homework assignment. I knew it is my job to help her, but I didn't feel like I should have done the work for her. If I had assisted her, I would have done her exact assignment. Was this the right way to go about it?

Tutor, Teacher, and Executioner

Dear T, T, & E,

Although we want to address the writers' requests, I think you did the right thing. It isn't a tutor's job to write a paper for a student, so why should it be any different for another homework assignment? Sometimes people need to learn the skills on their own.
Moreover, it wasn't her paper you would have been tutoring. Writers can come in for help with their own writing, but to work with a writer on a teacher's assignment for another class might not be ethical. You could offer to tutor some of the writer's own work together so that s/he might get an idea of how to review something by example. You could also give the writer some basic tips about how to tutor a paper. If the writer presses the issue, you can ask that s/he have her teacher contact the writing center to discuss the tutoring arrangement. Good luck!

The Guru

Comment on this article.

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CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

The 2003 NCPTW Ron Maxwell Award for Distinguished Leadership in Promoting the Collaborative Learning Practices of Peer Tutors in Writing

Deadline for Nominations: August 31, 2003

The NCPTW Ron Maxwell Leadership Award is given annually to a professional in the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing organization who has contributed with distinction to undergraduate student development through promoting collaborative learning among peer tutors in writing. The award recognizes an individual for dedication to and leadership in collaborative learning within writing centers, for aiding students in taking on more responsibility together for their learning, and thus for promoting the work of peer tutors. Its presentation also denotes extraordinary service to the evolution of this conference organization.

Such leadership may be demonstrated in a variety of ways, including but not limited to

- Building a record of bringing peer tutors to present at the Conference
- Giving service to the NCPTW through hosting the Conference, serving as program chair, leading in the search for future sites, etc.
- Fostering leadership skills among peer tutors
- Showing evidence of leadership in collaborative learning on the home campus
- Developing innovative peer tutoring programs in the home community
- In general, welcoming and meeting new challenges in leading a center guided by a collaborative learning philosophy

While other aspects of a candidate's professional performance—e.g., work with professional tutors, writing center research and publication—are respected by the NCPTW and are surely interrelated, this award is intended to recognize meritorious work in an area too little acknowledged.

Selection Process: An awards committee (consisting of past award recipients and Ron Maxwell) reviews nominations and chooses an annual recipient. A plaque and a $200 cash prize are funded by an endowment from Ron and Mary Maxwell.

Nomination Process: Send nominations by August 31, 2003, to Jon Olson via email jeo3@psu.edu, fax (814) 863-9627, or a letter addressed to Maxwell Award, Center for Excellence in Writing, Penn State University, 206 Boucke Building, University Park, PA 16802-5900. Consult http://www.chss.iup.edu/wc/ncptw> or call (814) 865-9243 for more information. Please provide the nominee's name, title, affiliation, postal address, email address, and phone number. Support the nomination with as much evidence as time permits. The committee admires distinguished writing, but it also welcomes quick and sketchy nominations.

Award History: At the 1997 NCPTW in Lexington, KY, Maxwell received a plaque from the conference organizers in recognition of his leadership in the organization. Twila Yates Papay of Rollins College received similar recognition at the 1998 NCPTW in Plattsburgh, NY. Maxwell's endowment ensured that such recognition would continue, and the NCPTW board insisted that the award bear the Maxwell name. Molly Wingate of Colorado College received the inaugural 1999 NCPTW Ron Maxwell Leadership Award. Jean Kiedaisch of University of Vermont received the award in 2000, Kevin Davis of East Central University in 2001, and Ben Rafoth of Indiana University of Pennsylvania in 2002.

Comment on this article.

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Join us next fall when the

International Writing Centers Association

and the

National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing

Come Together for the

IWCA-NCPTW 2003 Joint Conference

OCTOBER 23-25, 2003
In Hershey, Pennsylvania
A Chocolate Lover's Dream!

- Theme - *Writing Back**
- Keynote Address - Rebecca Moore Howard, Syracuse University
- Featured Presentation - Aesha Adams & Howard Rambsy, Penn State Univ.

- Feast on a chocolate extravaganza at Hershey Theme Park
- Located in south central Pennsylvania, minutes from the Harrisburg International Airport and easily accessible by car
- Meet friends by the fireplace in a college-lodge atmosphere at the wonderful Hershey Lodge and Convention Center
- Enjoy indoor pool, walking and hiking trails. Tour Chocolate World!
- Mark your calendar and plan to attend!
- * For more information, follow the links from the IWCA website, or go directly to www.wc.iup.edu/2003conference

BEN RAFOTH, 2003 CONFERENCE CHAIR (BRAFOTH@IUP.EDU)

Comment on this article.

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Article from *Volume 9, Number 1*

Call for Papers
MAWCA
Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association
Fifteenth Annual Conference

Saturday, April 5, 2003
McDaniel College
2 College Hill
Westminster MD, 21157

Keynote Speaker: Terry Riley

Terry Riley was the Director of the Writing Center at Bloomsburg University for eleven years, between 1990 and 2001. In 1991 he attended his first MAWCA Conference. In 1995, he was welcomed onto the MAWCA Executive Board. Terms as Vice President and President of MAWCA followed, and in 1999, he Co-Chaired NWCA 2002, the National Writing Center conference in Baltimore, MD.

In 2001, Terry returned to full-name teaching and passed the directorship of the Bloomsburg Writing Center on to another colleague. He looks back on the years at his Center knowing that no classroom experience will ever match the kind of satisfaction that accrues from the one-to-one contact of tutoring—that, in fact, no composition classroom can ever duplicate the quality of learning that goes on in a friendly, concerned writing center.

Lisa Breslin
The Writing Center
McDaniel College
2 College Hill
Westminster, MD 21157

Phone: 410.857.2420
Online Submissions:
http://www2.mcdaniel.edu/mawca/
lbreslin@mcdaniel.edu

Comment on this article.

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Book review of Elizabeth H. Boquet's *Noise from the Writing Center*

By Kristin J. Smith

> I am working toward a higher-risk/ higher-yield model for writing-center work . . . [I want] us to reformulate the question "what do tutors need to know?" in more musical terms: how might I encourage this tutor to operate the edge of his or her expertise? And, for tutors: where is the groove for this session? Where's the place where, together, we will really feel like we're jammin' and how do we get there?
>
> From Chapter Two, "Channeling Jimi Hendrix"

Scribble exclamations in the margins. Toss the book aside for a moment, then retrieve it: revel in the discomfort. Elizabeth H. Boquet wants her audience to squirm as they read *Noise from the Writing Center* (Utah State University Press 2002), a stylishly written text that effectively seeks to question the past fifteen years of writing center pedagogy.

In the introduction, Boquet recounts her graduate study, doggedly tutoring a student who still ended up failing freshman composition for a third time, an experience that disrupted the stability of Boquet's faith in the institution and pedagogy of the writing center. A decade later, and director of her own writing center at Fairfield University, Boquet received an email from a colleague complaining about the incessant noise emanating from the writing center. Shocked by her colleague's implication that nothing productive could be taking place within the noise, Boquet started to write *Noise from the Writing Center* in order to explore the moments when communication between tutors, writers and the academic community break down. Invoking artists like Jimi Hendrix and Trimpin, she asks the reader to pay attention to the moments of discomfort, disruption and dislocation in order to hear the noise.

Noise from the Writing Center will not tell its reader how to plan a thirty-minute session or offer pointers on tutoring ESL writers. It is not a tutor's how-to manual; it is the antithesis. Using a piece of performance art, a functional twenty-foot tall stack of eclectic guitars, as a metaphor, Boquet begs her readers to not only question the music that is writing center discourse, but the instruments themselves, the pedagogy.

Although Boquet's readers may feel squeamish about being offered little to replace the pedagogy she undermines, to do so would undercut her own argument that the learning occurs in the sharing, in the communication between tutors, writers and academic institutions. *Noise from the Writing Center* asks its readers to utilize these moments of dissonance; listening to noise is a provocative risk.

Comment on this article.

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To Read or Not To Read Aloud

By Aljosa Knez

"Oh, are you going to read it out loud?" anxiously asks Mac, as I embark on the adventure of reading his argument paper on why marijuana should be considered a stress-relieving necessity in a university environment.

"Yes, that is what I usually do. Do you mind?" I reply.

A long ten seconds of silence. And then a hesitant, "Well…I'm not used to people reading my stuff out loud. I just feel weird about hearing you say it...You know, my views are kind of out there." He blushes profusely. "I guess it's OK. But it's only the first draft so it's not perfect by any means."

Oh, Mac, I hope the paper is not perfect—otherwise there would not be much point in your being here, would there? Why do students think that their papers have to be absolutely above approach before they let anyone else lay their eyes on them?

As a consultant, I often encounter writers who, like Mac, are afraid to have their papers read out loud. I am conscious of the fact that sharing one's writing is a terrifying experience, but what could possibly be scary about me reading students' papers, making some constructive observations, and chatting with them about their ideas? A tutoring session, however, is easier for consultants than for consultees—after all, the consultants are not being judged and evaluated but rather act as the critics dispensing advice and suggestions.

Then I think a few years back, when I was required to visit the university writing center for one of my classes. I still remember how nerve-racking it was—for more than one reason. First of all, hearing that your writing needs improvement, no matter how trivial, is not pleasant – useful and beneficial, but not pleasant. The other reason had to do with the way the consultation was conducted.

I was invited to sit opposite the consultant, of whom I was in awe from the moment I lay my eyes on his authoritative frame. After introducing himself, he asked me a few questions about the assignment and then proceeded to silently peruse my literary accomplishment over which I had labored for three or four agonizing days. Now I sat opposite of him, wondering to myself, "Did his eye just twitch in bewilderment? Why is he raising his eyebrows, and is his nose itching or is that just a normal reaction to a really awful piece of writing?"

As he was brooding over the lines, I tried to follow the tip of his pen in an attempt to keep track of which passages he was reading in the paper. Sitting on the opposite side of the table and looking at the paper upside down, however, I saw the words like they were some foreign alphabet. Now and then the consultant would ask me a question about a certain word choice or what exactly I was trying to say, so we had to turn the paper around to my side, and I had to read several sections before and after the identified problem simply to determine the context in which the pointed-out ambiguity appeared.

In addition, when I came home and tried to decipher why he had marked a certain word, underlined a sentence, or put a question mark in the margin, I did not know or could not remember precisely what he had meant—because I had not been an active participant in the consultation, and I had only gotten a quick review of the marked passages when the consultant had finished silently reading the paper.

This experience as a consultee has affected my performance as a consultant. I have learned to always read papers out loud, to share them with my students so they can read with me. I believe that the only way to keep students actively involved is to not allow the opportunity for them to space out while I read, thus avoiding the transfer of the responsibility for editing solely for me. My writers need to own their papers fully at every stage in the writing process.

What I find most amazing about this technique is that even reluctant writers like our friend Mac cannot help being involved in the common effort. Most of the time, they are able to hear their own mistakes, and even if they claim they do not know anything about grammar, mechanics, or structure, they are usually intuitively able to recognize and correct their errors. At the same time, we are able to discuss alternatives, meaning, and organizational problems without struggling to establish where we are in the development of the argument. In the end, even initially skeptical Mac wrote in my on-line evaluation:

"Hearing the paper aloud rather than reading it silently to myself allowed me to process it on a different level. I was able to spot my own mistakes and as it turns out, I do know something about fixing the paper after all. All went wonderfully, and it was the best consultation I have ever had."

Yeah, baby—reading aloud works!

Comment on this article.

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Article from *Volume 9, Number 1*

Ben Rafoth: 2002 Ron Maxwell Award Winner

By Kristin J. Smith

In front of five hundred writing tutors and writing center directors, Ben Rafoth, director of the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Writing Center, became the fourth recipient of the 2002 NCPTW Ron Maxwell Award for Distinguished Leadership in Promoting the Collaborative Learning Practices of Peer Tutors in Writing. Dr. Rafoth accepted the award during the 2002 National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing (NCPTW) and Midwest Writing Centers Association (MWCA) conference hosted by the University of Kansas in Lawrence.

"I am proud to be the winner of the Ron Maxwell Award," Ben Rafoth later commented. "When I won, I was thinking of the past winners, Molly Wingate, Jean Kiedaisch, and Kevin Davis. Those three people have accomplished a lot, and when Jon [Olson] told me I'd won, it was a very pleasant surprise and I hoped I could live up to people's expectations of me for the 2003 conference."

Although Dr. Rafoth did not initially aspire to direct a writing center, he had always been interested in being a writing teacher. Dr. Rafoth fell into the role of writing center director in 1988, a year after obtaining a permanent faculty position at IUP. He recounts being drawn to the position because he would be able to continue to work with former students and because the writing center was one of the first locations on campus to have a computer lab available to students. Currently Dr. Rafoth teaches both undergraduate and graduate courses on theories of composition and literacy, as well as research methods.

Dr. Rafoth solicited tutors and directors to write chapters which he edited and compiled in *A Peer Tutor's Guide: Helping Writers One to One* (Heinemann Boynton/Cook), a practical guide that often serves as a training guide for tutors. The book addresses common concerns tutors may have such as engaging reluctant writers and tutoring emotionally charged situations. *A Peer Tutor's Guide* continues to be well received by writing center communities.

Presently Dr. Rafoth is undertaking the enormous task of hosting next year's joint International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) and NCPTW conference on October 23-25 in Hershey, Pennsylvania. He volunteered to host after friends and associates Harvey Kail and Jon Olson persuaded the two organizations to work together. Rebecca Moore Howard, an expert in plagiarism issues, is the scheduled keynote speaker. Dr. Rafoth refurbished the conference format this year by adding endnote speakers, Penn State graduate students Aesha Adams and Howard Rambsy.

In hosting the 2003 IWCA-NCPTW conference, Ben Rafoth upholds the image of the Ron Maxwell Award: promoting collaborative education, leading within the writing center community, and dedicating his career to learning.

Comment on this article.

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Troubleshooting ESL Grammar Issues in the Writing Center

By Heather Lusty

In the Writing Center, non-native speakers are able to receive detailed, constructive advice that shapes their writing style and grammar usage. Yet, for writing center consultants unfamiliar with basic problems encountered by ESL students, the challenge to positively contribute to the students' ideas of writing becomes harder. Because I worked as an ESL teacher for several years before coming to the Writing Center as a tutor, I have had some success applying strategies used by ESL instructors and geared towards encouraging non-native speakers to learn to revise their work. I have found that focusing on the primary error patterns and presenting simple, interactive corrections make the most of a consultation with a non-native speaker that needs grammatical pointers.

Oftentimes ESL papers seem convoluted with a myriad of mistakes, and deciding on the most important issues may seem confusing. Since ESL students are usually very conscious of their grammar usage difficulties, it is best to concentrate on the primary error patterns that most distract the reader from the content (i.e. verb tense problems, subject verb agreement, articles) and start with the biggest distraction. For example, run-on sentences might make the paper harder to read than missing plurals. Verb tense errors might make a chronological essay difficult to follow. It is important to pick two or three major problems when you read through the paper and establish the common mistakes that you will deal with in that session. You might say: "Let's address the tense errors and articles in this session." This is important as it helps the students focus on specific and identifiable difficulties, giving them a feeling of progress and control.

Once you decide on specific areas, pick an example out of the text. Explain why this is an error and write out a correct version of the word or sentence. Ask students if they recognize the difference between the two versions. Often students are able to spot grammatical problems when they are pointed out, but when looking at a larger picture, they cannot distinguish correct from incorrect usage. If students can generalize a rule from your example, they can look for similar patterns when they are revising on their own. However, if students don't understand the rule, referring them to handouts or handbook pages is a great way to help them identify the rule and see examples that help refresh their memories.

Sometimes consultants also encounter phrases that are awkward and unclear. The easiest way to determine what students mean is to underline passages that are confusing and ask them to explain what they mean in their own words. Once they've said, for example, "I want to show how being rich isn't always great," then you can suggest two or three more ways to say the same thing, including the explanation they've given you, and encourage them to select the phrase with which they feel most comfortable. If students are struggling with vocabulary or word choice, having them look up alternatives in a thesaurus both ensures their familiarity with writing tools and helps them with further revisions.

Using your own judgment as a reader to spot the most obvious, large-scale issues and using an interactive dialogic approach to involve students in their revisions are two simple ways to approach consultations with ESL students. If appropriate, you can note other things the student might need to watch out for, so the student has a guideline to continue editing at home.

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Article from *Volume 9, Number 1*

Working With Graduate Writers

By Yana Keyzerman

Working with graduate writers can be a pleasure or a challenge depending on how you look at it. My first consultation as a new writing consultant was with a graduate writer, and I remember being scared that I would do something wrong. For some reason, a graduate student's writing seemed more important to me, and I felt that making a mistake in that consultation would carry more consequences. But I made it through that consultation and many others since then. My experiences have helped me realize that in order to make graduate consultations as effective as possible, the consultant should not be afraid of making content suggestions and should try to develop a close working relationship with the writer through a series of consultations.

By the time students reach the graduate level, they learn to value their writing and how other people view it. Most of the students who come to the writing center are working on their theses or dissertations, which are the culmination of their graduate experiences. It is important to them to have this work appear in the most readable format for approval by a committee and for publication purposes. Therefore, these writers spend a lot of time making sure their writing is clear, free of grammatical and format errors, and flows well. In my experience, graduate students are usually involved and receptive to suggestions for improvement because they have more invested in their work than, for example, a freshman composition student would. This involvement makes the consultation experience rewarding for the student and the consultant.

However, because so much time has gone into writing the document, some students may view their writing as permanent and may be hesitant about making big changes. This leaves the consultant in the position of editor or proofreader and cautious about suggesting large revisions in terms of structure or content. In fact, many graduate students come in specifically requesting a "grammar check." In addition, the documents sometimes are written about subjects the consultant has little knowledge of, which also adds to this cautious approach. The consultant may feel that since she does not know the subject matter, she is not qualified to make content-based decisions.

I've experienced these situations and fears while working with graduate writers, and I firmly believe that it is our job as peer tutors to make suggestions about most aspects of the document. We are making suggestions as outsiders reading the text, and we are armed with insights the writer may not notice. Also, graduate writers should have a great enough knowledge of their field that they can make informed and responsible choices about our suggestions. If students do not agree with a suggestion, this opens a dialogue between them and their consultants that will usually lead to mutual understanding and respect.

My final advice for working with graduate writers is that the best way to make graduate consultations effective is for the student to work with the same consultant every time. This allows them to develop a relationship and learn each other's styles, which in turn can help develop trust and facilitate communication. All of the situations and problems described above can benefit from a close working relationship between the writer and the consultant. Another benefit to this approach is that the consultant will over time learn a little about the subject matter of the student's thesis or dissertation, and the consultant will then be more confident in offering content suggestions instead of simply working with grammar.

Working with graduate writers can be a tough job, but consultants should not be intimidated by it. They should give graduate writers content and structure suggestions, not simply become proofreaders. And consultants should stress the importance of the writer's meeting with the same person each time so that they can develop a good working relationship, which will benefit them both in the long run.

Comment on this article.

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Article from *Volume 9, Number 1*

Learning on the Prairie

By Alex Doehrer

Lawrence, Kansas, shrouded in clouds and rain, was anything but gray at the University of Kansas. On the sixth and seventh floors of their Union Building, the 19th annual National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing (NCPTW) joined ranks with the 21st annual Midwest Writing Centers Association Conference for the "Conference on the Prairie." The collaboration of conferences went off without a hitch.

Michele Eodice and her staff were everywhere in the KU Union, popping their heads in during sessions or just smiling and greeting conference goers and helping them find their away around the University or Lawrence. One of the best aspects of the conference for Eodice was "working with the support staff I have here at KU—especially as they contributed their energy and creativity to making a great web site and program logo. And that the weather was not too threatening and we didn't need 'warm woolen mittens' yet!"

It was a fabulous weekend for networking, making new friends, and most importantly, for learning. "I thought the conference was a lot of fun and a great learning experience," said Jamie Dunnick, a peer tutor at Penn State, "It was neat to see how another school was set up, both within the writing center and outside of it."

During the Friday evening reception, as tutors and writing center professionals trickled into KU from all over the country, a Jazz Combo jammed, and Keynote Speaker Beth Boquet sang terrifically during a few songs with the band. After socializing and great apple cider, the evening ended. Saturday morning's sessions gave us the occasion to more formally share our writing center work. "The workshops I attended were informative and dealt with different content than those I've previously observed at other conferences," said Jen Epting, a fourth-year tutor at Muhlenberg College. "I thought the facilities were top-notch, and KU's Writing Center staff was very well-organized."

During a fabulous lunch on Saturday, Beth Boquet, author of the book *Noise from the Writing Center* and director of the Writing Center at Fairfield University in Fairfield, Connecticut, gave an inspiring keynote speech. "Beth's speech was perfectly in synch with the metaphor behind the conference [Learning with Tutors] and was directly applicable to every educator, tutor, and administrator in that banquet room," said Jon Blitzer, Writing Center Peer Tutor Coordinator at Muhlenberg College.

During Saturday evening's research fair, an optional trip to the KU Writer's Roost gave many people the opportunity to compare writing centers. At the research fair, tutors and directors presented various projects related to writing centers, including one about the best music to play while we tutor. Classical beat out rock for optimal neuron firing.

Since this NCPTW was a joint collaboration with MWCA, many workshops were led by directors and administrators. "I found the director-led presentations perfectly understandable and very informative," said Blitzer. "However, a year ago (when I was a student/tutor), I think I might have felt overwhelmed (and less comfortable) in a session led by directors. In general, I find student-led presentations to naturally be more comfortable for student audiences, and perhaps more energetic overall." Becky Haas, Writing Center Student Coordinator at Southwest State University in Marshall, Minnesota, commented, "I thought it was appropriate that there were some more upscale director-led presentations so that those people possibly pursuing a career in the rhetoric and composition field were able to see what they need to look at and strive for."

Learning with tutors, the theme for the conference, proved to be true."My favorite session was on tutoring Hispanic ESL students, lead by a group of tutors from Texas A+M International," said Dunnick. "They talked about cultural and linguistic differences and how we as tutors can help these students. I can't wait to tutor a paper that has some of the concerns I learned about because I really feel like I will know what to do." Online tutoring was one of the big buzzwords at the conference. "I attended as many 'tech' sessions as possible," said Blitzer. "I wanted to learn as much as possible about asynchronous and synchronous on-line writing center tutoring. Really, before the conference, I didn't know that those terms existed or how they possibly would apply to writing centers. Going into the conference, I knew next to nothing about on-line tutoring. Coming out, I feel like I have a firm grasp of the various ways that on-line tutoring can be implemented without drastically altering the existing pedagogy of a writing center."

This year's joint NCPTW/MWCA conference certainly prompted noise from those in attendance. A nice dynamic developed between tutors and writing center professionals, while a great deal of learning took place for all. Let's hope next year's conference in Hershey is just as successful!

Comment on this article.

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Article from *Volume 9, Number 1*

Inquiry-Based Tutoring: The Value of Good Questions

By Laura Greenfield

Recently I asked a fellow writing tutor if she felt—as I did—that as a result of tutoring, her own writing was improving. She said "No" and did not understand how one could affect the other. So I asked, "When you're writing, don't you ask yourself the same questions that you ask your tutees?" To my horrified surprise, her response was: "You ask your tutees questions?"

Yes, I do. For questioning to be effective in a tutorial, however, we need to agree on a basic set of assumptions: ideas are more important than grammar; we are not editors; tutorials are learning experiences in which we help our tutees improve their skills as writers—not simply perfect their papers; and we are facilitators, helping writers to communicate their ideas clearly.

My colleague dismissed the idea of questioning. "If I ask them questions," she protested, "they'll just turn it around on me and ask 'but what do you think I should say?'" She missed the point. What matters is not simply the act of questioning but also the kinds of questions that are asked. A problematic question such as "How can you make this sentence better?" does not give writers any tools with which to improve their writing. Instead, this type of questioning can result in a debate over who is going to come up with a better sentence.

Consider the following examples of constructive questions. Instead of "How can you fix this?" try "What are you trying to say here?" As opposed to "This discussion would work better on page two," try "Why did you decide to discuss this here?" Rather than "How do you think you should introduce this paragraph?" try "What is the most important thing you want your reader to understand after having read this paragraph?"

These examples lead to a key point: we as tutors should not know the answers to the questions that we ask. Our goal in questioning is to elicit ideas that might not yet be clear in the papers and to help writers think about their ideas in order to devise their own strategies for revision. Although it might seem clear to tutors how to "fix" what is not working, resisting the urge to make our own concrete suggestions is important; we might have fine papers after doing our work, but they might not be the papers the writers intend. Further, a tutee cannot counter with, "No, why did you decide to use this quotation here?"

Constructive questioning allows us to learn writers' intentions without imposing our own interpretations; it allows the writers to think through ideas in new ways and draw their own conclusions; it equips the writers with questions that will help them to revise on their own; it puts the writers in control of their tutorials; and it provides opportunities to discuss the content rather than just the grammar. So if you tend to hold the pen, find yourself struggling to "fix" papers, or have a habit of doing all the talking…don't! Ask questions!

Comment on this article.

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The Dangling Modifier

An international newsletter by and for peer tutors in writing, produced in association with the NCPTW.
The mission of *The Dangling Modifier* is to provide an international forum for ongoing conversation among peer tutors in writing.
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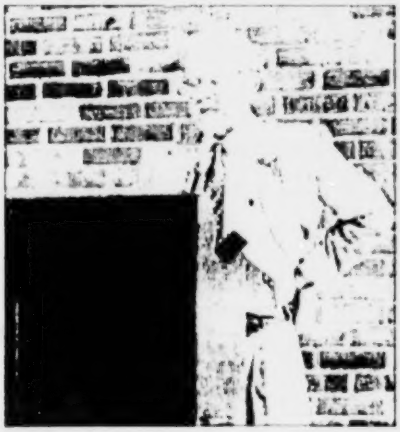
Don't Just Lean on the Lectern: Making the Most of Your Conference Experience

By Brian Fallon, Writing Consultant
Colorado State University

Sweaty palms and shaky knees are what I remember from the first time I presented at the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing (NCPTW). Actually, I remember much more than that, but I was definitely nervous about presenting the co-authored paper that I helped write. I asked Michele, my director, what to do if I felt faint. She said, "That's what the lectern's for."

The 15th Annual MAWCA Conference

By Katie Champion and Erin Duffy, Writing Tutors
McDaniel College Writing Center



On Saturday, April 5, McDaniel College's Writing Center hosted the 15th Annual Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association

Reflecting on Four Years of Tutoring in Writing

By Katie Rank, Peer Tutor
Penn State University

My first memory of the Penn State Writing Center is one of feeling instantly at home with a group of people who liked to talk about books. My four years of peer tutoring experience ...

From St. Augustine Confessing to Dr. Dave Sinning: Teaching Nontraditional Texts in the Tutor Training Course

By Mary Beth Simmons, Director of the Writing Center
Villanova University

On the first day of "Tutoring Writers: Theory and Practice," I ask my future tutors to take out a sheet of paper and make a list of 10 nouns or adjectives that they would use to describe themselves.

(MAWCA) Conference. Approximately 135 professors and tutors from colleges...

Looking Forward to Writing Back: A Tutor's Perspective on the Upcoming IWCA-NCPTW Conference
By Tara Warman, Writing Tutor
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Come for the fresh perspectives and the elbow rubbing. Stay for the roller coasters and the mouth-watering Hershey's chocolate. The International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) and the National Conference on Peer Tutoring ...

www.writing_and_the_web.com: Coming to Terms with Technology in the Writing Center
By Marie Lilly, Technology Tutor and Writing Tutor
McDaniel College

Computers and technology have become an increasingly important part of the writing process. In fact, most students and writers no longer write their papers in ink but instead compose and edit them on computers...

Adapting Counseling Skills to Peer Tutoring in Writing
By Tiffany Yanosky, Peer Tutor
Penn State University

Throughout your peer tutoring careers, many of you have surely experienced a tutorial in which you encountered an emotional writer. Perhaps the writer was presenting you with a paper about the death of a loved one; perhaps he was angry...

Writing Centers, Literacy Education, and Rebecca Moore Howard
By Stefanie Klevze, Peer Tutor
Penn State University

This fall's IWCA-NCPTW 2003 Joint Conference in Hershey, PA (October 23-25) will feature Rebecca Moore Howard as the keynote

How to Begin a Student-Produced Writing Center Newsletter
By Tiffany Yanosky, Peer Tutor
Penn State University

1. Determine the interest level of your targeted audience.
    - Are you writing for your writing center's tutors or for your entire campus?

How I Got to Africa
By Twila Yates Papay, Professor of English and Writing
Rollins College

Four years ago, I spent some months in Africa, including a number of weeks working in the amazing Writing Center at the University of the Western Cape, outside Cape Town, South Africa.

Review of *The OWL Construction and Maintenance Guide* edited by James A. Inman and Clinton Gardner
By Matt Hughes, Peer Tutor
Penn State University

When Julie Story, associate director of the Penn State University Undergraduate Writing Center, asked me last year if I was interested in helping her with our e-tutoring initiative, I immediately said yes. As an uber geek and peer tutor...

The Birth and the First Steps of our Writing Center at METU, Turkey
By Defne Akinci and Aylin Atakent, Coordinators of the Academic Writing Center
Middle East Technical University

Ever since the Academic Writing Center at Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara, Turkey started to operate in 2001, we have often wondered how our students used to cope...

speaker. Howard is finishing her fourth year as ...

An Introduction to *Spilling the Bean*

By the Writing Center Staff at Coe College

Two years after our writing center began operation in 1986, the writing center director initiated a staff development program required for all new staff members. This four-term course sequence...

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NCPTW and IWCA to Hold Joint Conference in 2003
Call for nominations for the 2003 NCPTW Ron Maxwell Award

"Talking Back – Writing Black" With Aesha and Howard

By Tiffany Yanosky, Peer Tutor
Penn State University

Aesha Adams and Howard Rambsy II, graduate students in the English Department at Penn State University, will present the endnote speech at the IWCA-NCPTW 2003 Joint Conference on ...

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Assistant Editor: Stefanie Klevze
Webmaster: Matt Hughes
Webmaster: Jason Cohen

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The Dangling Modifier

Staff Editorial

Article from *Volume 9, Number 2*

Staff Editorial

Welcome to *The Dangling Modifier*! This Spring 2003 issue, just the second to appear online, promises to surpass even last semester's successful issue.

Inside this issue, you will find numerous articles covering the 2003 MAWCA Conference at McDaniel College in Westminster, Maryland and the upcoming IWCA-NCPTW 2003 Joint Conference in Hershey, Pennsylvania. These articles provide information about individuals' presentations as well as the preparation that conference planners must do in order to have a successful conference. The issue also includes feature articles about the IWCA-NCPTW keynote speaker, Dr. Rebecca Moore Howard, who serves as associate professor of writing and rhetoric at Syracuse University, and the endnote speakers, Aesha Adams and Howard Rambsy II, who are graduate students in the English Department at Penn State University.

In addition to this usual conference coverage, our newsletter offers articles pertaining to the characteristics of individual writing centers and tutorials. Two articles cover international writing centers, one by Defne Akinci and Aylin Atakent of the Middle East Technical University in Ankara, Turkey and the other by Twila Yates Papay, a Rollins College English Professor and former writing center director who visited a South African writing center. Both articles provide insightful information with which American writing centers can compare and contrast their services. The issue also contains a reflection piece on the college career of an undergraduate peer tutor coordinator, a review of *The OWL Construction and Maintenance Guide* CD-ROM (Inman, James, and Clinton Gardner, eds., IWCA Press, 2002), and an article with tips on how to get emotional tutees to focus on their papers during tutorials.

Our issue has also retained some features, such as our message boards, our Tutor Guru advice column, and our Dangling Doodlers' game page. The staff of *The Dangling Modifier* encourages our readers to engage in a dynamic dialogue about the articles on the message boards, to submit questions to the Tutor Guru, and to enjoy our game page where we present a wordsearch of vocabulary pertaining to writing centers.

In the fall, an entirely new staff will intern for *The Dangling Modifier*. The managing editor, Tiffany Yanosky, will graduate with a B.A. in Sociology with minors in English and Information Systems and Statistical Analysis. Stefanie Klevze, the assistant managing editor and public relations manager, will continue her studies in English with minors in American Studies and Sociology. The two webmasters, Matt Hughes and Jason Cohen, will also continue their studies. Matt is majoring in Information Sciences and Technology, and Jason is majoring in English with a Technical Writing minor.

We will sorely miss our collaboration with our advisor Julie Story, associate director of Penn State's Undergraduate Writing Center, and our correspondence with writers, tutors, and directors at other colleges and universities. We say farewell to our readership and express thanks for your submissions and for a wonderful internship experience. We sincerely appreciate the articles that you have submitted, and we encourage you to continue to write for our newsletter. Thanks for your support, and please keep contributing!

– *The Dangling Modifier* staff

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Tutor Guru

Have a tutoring question you just can't answer? Ask the Tutor Guru! Please keep your questions less than 200 words in length.

Dear Tutor Guru,

My tutoring shift is right in the middle of my most hectic day of the week. I go to class for a few hours, then I come to the Writing Center, and then I head off to another job. Sometimes all the stress that I have to deal with before and after the shift creeps into my sessions. I feel bad for being short with my tutees sometimes, but I just can't help it. I hear that you are a pretty Zen kind of person, so I am wondering if you know any meditations that I could use before my shift to calm down.

Serenity Seeker

Dear Serenity Seeker,

I understand and sympathize with your need for inner peace. Many tutors often feel their serenity slipping away throughout their busy days. In future semesters, you should schedule tutorial shifts during less hectic days, but in the meantime, the Guru feels your pain

Dear Hurried Helper,

I appreciate your desire to thoroughly help your tutees with their writing, but my words of wisdom to you really depend on the particular circumstances in your universe. If you feel generous with your time and comfortable enough to intellectually enlighten a tutee outside of your shift's hours, you can certainly do so. Be aware, though, that possible consequences exist.

First, by continuing your tutorials outside of your regular shifts, you are no longer representing or working for your writing center. You are not being paid for your extra input of time, and you are establishing more informal relationships with your tutees. These relationships could lead to an excess in personal involvement with a tutee, all for a high cost in time and wages. Also be aware that a tutee might begin to contact you for future papers instead of visiting the writing center and using its services. As the Guru I deem such action as a dishonorable and immoral conflict of personal and professional goals.

Second, acknowledge that e-tutoring via email and IM increases the chances of your tutees plagiarizing. Although e-tutoring has many benefits, your tutees can easily copy and paste the words from your suggestions and then use them as their own. The Guru considers such plagiarism to be an unethical obstruction to the energy, creativity, and intelligence that lies deeply within everyone. As a and offers a variety of solutions.

First, to prevent "being short" with your tutees in the future, be sure to rest your mind and body sufficiently at night and to schedule enough time for solitude during your day. Such rest and solitude will awaken your senses and sooth your body's physical reactions to stress.

Second, immediately before a tutorial shift, try to find a few minutes for additional solitude. To respond to your need for meditation assistance, I suggest returning to your dorm room or apartment or finding an empty classroom where you can sit in quietude and concentrate on your inner self. I cannot endorse any particular religious meditations, but I can assure you that many meditations rely on similar techniques, such as closing your eyes and concentrating on regulating your inhaling and exhaling instead of worrying about your hectic daily schedule.

In addition to meditation, you might want to reenergize your mind by taking a quick nap or listening to soothing music as you walk across campus to your Writing Center. Just be sure to not divert your attention completely away from your stressors, or you will bury your stress, creating a facade of tranquility and a reality of suppressed and increased negativity.

Finally, if you feel stress creeping up on you during a tutorial, take some deep breaths and maybe a couple sips of coffee or herbal tea, and try your best to focus only on passing your knowledge of writing on to your tutee. As the atmosphere surrounding you becomes permeated with harmony, the harmony will also transfer to those around you.

Peace,
Tutor Guru

Dear Tutor Guru,

Sometimes my college's writing center closes or my tutoring shift ends before I am finished helping a tutee with his writing. I have heard that some writing tutors give their tutees their contact information so their tutees can contact them later in the day. If a tutee needs result, if you decide to e-tutor your tutor, be sure to adhere as closely as possible to your writing center's tutorial methods.

In short, the next time you feel tempted to help a tutee after hours, seek a Middle Path, one that enables you to enrich another being without compromising your own needs. Set your boundaries where they are most comfortable for you, and be alert enough to change your boundaries if interpersonal problems begin to arise.

Peace,
Tutor Guru

Dear Tutor Guru,

I am a traditional college student, and recently I had my first tutorial with a returning adult student. Because of our age difference, I was unsure of how to act around him. Can you offer any guidance on how a youthful writing tutor should interact with an older student?

Petrified "Peer"

Dear Petrified "Peer",

I am sure that you have heard of the saying "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." In agreement with this saying, I advise you to be careful with the special considerations that you make for returning adult students. If you roles were reversed, and you approached an adult student for help, you would certainly want them to pass on their knowledge to you. Therefore, when they approach you, you should unhesitantly want to help them.

According to my conversations with peer tutors, we do not treat adult students much differently than we treat traditional students. You might be concerned about "talking down" to adult students, but you help with his paper, and your shift is ending or the writing center is about to close, is it ethical to give him your Instant Message screen name or your email address? Or should you refer him to another tutor or tell him to return to the center later? Help! I need your wisdom!

Hurried Helper

probably do not talk down anyway, even with students who are your peers. Simply assess your tutees' knowledge by the amount of information that they communicate, and then enlighten them by helping them to learn the knowledge that they do not seem to possess.

You might be surprised to learn that many returning adults do not mind being taught about common writing concerns, such as citing correctly and using computers and the internet. After all, obtaining these skills is necessary for them to succeed in college and their future careers, and these skills were either not taught to them when they were in school previously or were forgotten in the many years since then. As a result, do not refrain from enlightening your tutees only because you fear that you will offend them – knowledge is much too important to our destiny in life.

If you are still concerned about your age difference with adult students, remember to begin a tutorial with some small talk and to offer encouragement throughout the session, just like you do with other students. To help create discussion, you can ask them about their experiences in their classes, the reasons why they have returned to school, and their family, that is, if they mention their relatives. If you use these tips, you and other young tutors should be able to easily help returning adult students with their writing and with their confidence about returning to school. May my teachings to you lead to the banishment of your fears and to a life of realization and understanding!

Peace,
Tutor Guru

Printable version of this article.

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Don't Just Lean on the Lectern: Making the Most of Your Conference Experience

By Brian Fallon, Writing Consultant
Colorado State University

Sweaty palms and shaky knees are what I remember from the first time I presented at the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing (NCPTW). Actually, I remember much more than that, but I was definitely nervous about presenting the co-authored paper that I helped write. I asked Michele, my director, what to do if I felt faint. She said, "That's what the lectern's for."

Thankfully, my fellow presenters and I made it through the presentation without any problems, yet my experience at the conference was much different from what I had expected. I had envisioned a huge room filled with many strangers waiting to criticize our presentation (and, yes, I did realize that this was a writing center conference). In reality, our presentation was in a classroom with about twelve audience members who were there because they were interested in what we had to say. I realized then that this conference is about sharing ideas, offering advice, and furthering our understanding of our roles as tutors. I found that my conference experience was not unlike the peer tutoring situations that we encounter in the writing center.

Still, when thinking back on my first conference, I wish I had known or considered many things before attending it. Giving a presentation can be intimidating, as many of us have learned. However, talking to your writing center director and looking at the IWCA-NCPTW 2003 Joint Conference website (http://www.wc.iup.edu/2003conference/) and the NCPTW-MWCA 2002 Joint Conference website (http://www.writing.ku.edu/ncptw-mwca/index.html) will help you get a sense of how to present your work and what other presentations have addressed. I also encourage you to talk to tutors who have been to a conference.

As a novice public speaker, I wish that I had assessed the speaking situation more thoroughly. Checking out the presentation room beforehand to get a feel for the space in which you will be working is a good idea. Also, knowing that your audience is there because they are interested in what you have to say can help calm your anxieties. Furthermore, you are the expert on your topic. Although you may be speaking for most of the presentation, be prepared to answer questions and to facilitate a discussion. People are interested in your study, research, or paper, so they will undoubtedly have questions for you regarding your findings.

In addition to doing your own presentation, take this opportunity to meet other writing center folks. One of the more memorable experiences that I had at the NCPTW at Muhlenberg College was meeting other tutors. My co-presenter and I shared tutoring stories, went out to dinner, compared presentation notes, and enjoyed good conversation with others from universities throughout the country.

Overall, the best conference advice that I can give is to think ahead, be prepared, and have a great time sharing your interests and research with others. Good luck with your research, preparation, and presentations for the IWCA-NCPTW 2003 Joint Conference in Hershey!

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Article from *Volume 9, Number 2*

Adapting Counseling Skills to Peer Tutoring in Writing

By Tiffany Yanosky, Peer Tutor
Penn State University

Throughout your peer tutoring careers, many of you have surely experienced a tutorial in which you encountered an emotional writer. Perhaps the writer was presenting you with a paper about the death of a loved one; perhaps he was angry at a teacher who had criticized him or given him a low grade; or perhaps he was depressed over his life and his resulting lack of time management. What solutions do you use in these situations? In your interaction with your writing center's coordinators and tutors, you probably have heard that you are not a counselor and, therefore, should not act as one. But are you truly wrong to help the writer a little with his personal life? I think not. Through my experience as both a peer writing tutor and a certified mental health counselor, I have realized the similarities in the conduct of tutoring and counseling sessions, and I recommend that tutors learn general counseling methods in case an emotional session occurs.

In the first few minutes of a tutorial, the tutor and writer establish a relationship that will hopefully produce a dynamic that lasts throughout the session. Usually a tutor will begin his session by introducing himself to the writer and then making some small talk. This small talk is intended to create a friendly atmosphere in which the writer can easily share his writing concerns. Often, though, such dynamic is difficult to create, especially when a writer is emotional over an event in his life, whether academic or personal. As a result, early on in the session, the tutor must decide to either first address the writer's emotions or to ignore them and instead focus on the tasks of improving the paper and teaching the writer.

During this initial stage of the tutorial, I feel that counseling skills are highly useful. In my counseling training at a human services agency, I learned that each counseling session must begin with making the client comfortable. First, the counselor observes the client's verbal and nonverbal behavior. He listens carefully to the client's statements and tone of voice, and he looks for any poor posture, lack of eye contact, or drooping of the head. Next, the counselor addresses the negative behavior by pointing it out and asking the client what he can do to help. If he fails to observe and verbally address such behavior, he begins to allow the client to control the session with negative emotions. In contrast, if he acknowledges the behavior, the client understands that the counselor genuinely cares for his emotions, and then the client is relieved and can focus on the conduct of the session.

In my opinion, the same methods should be used for writing tutorials in which an emotional writer immediately begins to control the session with his release of anguish or frustration. Instead of allowing the writer to control the session and instead of focusing on tutoring and disregarding negative behavior, a tutor should set aside a few minutes to acknowledge the writer's feelings. I suggest that tutors make comments such as "You look upset. Is something wrong?" or "I'm sorry that this problem has happened to you." If the writer wants to talk about his problems, you should acknowledge his feelings but spend no more than a few minutes offering sympathy or tastefully suggesting the use of low-cost campus and community services. Whatever the specific situation, the tutor should address the writer's personal concerns before his paper's global and local concerns.

After these first minutes of the tutorial, the tutor and writer begin to discuss the paper's requirements and then the paper itself. During these two stages of the tutorial, hopefully the writer's emotions already have been addressed, and they will not arise again. If the writer still appears to be emotional, the tutor should suggest that he return later when he is less emotional. But if all emotional concerns have been resolved, the tutor should begin to address the writer's writing concerns. Even this stage of the tutorial, however, requires the use of certain counseling skills, particularly the technique of guiding through questioning.

In both tutorials and counseling sessions, after the first few minutes, the client is allowed to moderately control the session. In counseling sessions, if the client's thoughts begin to stray, the counselor gently guides him back to the issue. The counselor uses mostly questions to probe the client's thoughts, and the counselor provides options and explanations instead of answers. Otherwise, the client will feel like he is being unheard or controlled, and he will lose confidence or become angry.

The same techniques should be used in a writing tutorial: the tutor should address the writer's concerns with writing and should change the subject only when the session is beginning to be counterproductive. At all other times, the writer must have adequate control of the discussion and the writing of his paper. The tutor facilitates such interaction by asking questions and providing only suggestions and explanations.

If tutors acknowledge the similarities between tutoring and counseling and adapt these counseling skills to their peer tutoring, sessions will become less emotionally-charged and more productive for both the tutor and writer. The counseling techniques mentioned in this article are not intended to transform tutors into counselors but to temporarily help tutors and writers overcome the personal problems that serve as learning obstacles. Tutors work in order to encourage academic development, but that development cannot occur unless the writer's anxieties and anger are reduced. These emotions can be addressed only by acknowledgement of the emotional behavior and guidance of the session through questions, suggestions, and explanations.

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Article from *Volume 9, Number 2*

Reflecting on Four Years of Tutoring in Writing

By Katy Rank, Peer Tutor
Penn State University

My first memory of the Penn State Writing Center is one of feeling instantly at home with a group of people who liked to talk about books. My four years of peer tutoring experience and three semesters of peer tutor coordinating have transformed me from a confused and discontent freshman into a graduating English major with an emphasis in writing.

Tutoring is more than just a part-time job for me. It has become the largest and most important part of my personality. To my co-workers, I am merely the tutor who also plays rugby; to the rest of the world, I am the person who is in love with writing. I get phone calls at all hours of the day and night to discuss papers and to answer grammar questions. My teammates come to me to talk about application essays for graduate school and study abroad programs. I am the girl who emails Suave to tell them they have a misplaced modifier in their shampoo slogan and to ask them if they want to discuss less confusing alternatives! Everyone who knows me also knows that writing is my passion.

My passion for all things related to writing has kept me very active at the Writing Center. I never leave 219 Boucke Building, home of Penn State's Writing Center, without learning something about the writing process. Four years' worth of guest speakers and workshops, tutoring sessions, and tutor discussion forums have helped me to look critically at all writing and to never consider a paper complete unless I have read it out loud and discussed it with another tutor.

I often wonder what would have happened to me had my Freshman Composition instructor not suggested that I become a tutor. I certainly would have never found the community of like-minded people I have come to value so highly. Tutoring allows people from all circles of academia to meet and discuss our passion for writing. As a result, as I step back from my position as Peer Tutor Coordinator and look at the new faces in our tutor training class, I am envious of the journey awaiting them. These students get to experience the epiphany that reading aloud truly works. They also have yet to discover the overwhelming response to a grammatical question posed to the whole staff. Once these new tutors realize tutoring has no plateau, no peak, they will find themselves at the same place as me – on the verge of graduation and just beginning to appreciate all that I have learned and been able to share about writing.

At this point, I have no immediate plans beyond graduation day. The only thing I know is that my career will center on writing. My experience as a peer tutor will prove vital to my future as a writer, educator, or editor. Regardless of my day job, I know I will remain a peer tutor because I so often catch myself going into "tutor mode" when explaining things to others. I look forward to a long relationship with writing, both creating my own and facilitating the creating of others', and I thank the Penn State Writing Center for providing this experience.

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The 15th Annual MAWCA Conference

By Katie Champion and Erin Duffy
Writing Tutors from McDaniel College Writing Center

On Saturday, April 5, McDaniel College's Writing Center hosted the 15th Annual Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association (MAWCA) Conference. Approximately 135 professors and tutors from colleges and universities across the region congregated to share their experiences as well as to learn from the experiences of others.

Tutors, teachers, and directors presented twenty-eight papers, in both individual and panel format. Through the presentations, attendees learned about tutor training, tutoring techniques, marketing strategies, and the implications of having a Writing Center that is a place for performing writing as an event. We held discussions about a wide range of writing center issues, from tutoring writers who use non-standard dialects in their papers to using technology.

Terry Riley, former Director of Bloomsburg University's Writing Center, was the keynote speaker. He shared his insight on the tutoring experience and the history of writing and literature in higher education. Riley offered a mix a wry wit and well-researched wisdom to reveal to his audience that until students who visit writing centers claim ownership of their work, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for tutors to help them improve their writing skills.

"This year's conference proved to be highly enlightening for all participants," writes Barbara Gaal Lutz, MAWCA president. "The organization of the sessions, the inclusion of the Mentors' Mingle and the small personal touches (carnation boutonnieres, door prizes, souvenirs) contributed to a festive and rewarding conference experience."

Throughout the day, attendees visited a Book Display and participated in a fledgling MAWCA mentorship program. The mentorship grew out of evaluations from previous conferences. These evaluations suggested that a one-day event was not enough to sustain and inspire participants throughout the year. "Wish we had information like this at our fingertips all year," some folks noted.

In the spirit of continued support, the MAWCA mentorship program was born. More than 40 conference attendees were "matched" with each other (i.e. each received the other's email address and phone number as well as time to mingle). Our hope is that each person stays in contact throughout the year - offering advice and consolation as needed.

A year ago, when Lisa when Breslin, Director of the McDaniel College Writing Center, announced that we would be hosting the conference, none of the McDaniel College tutors realized the hours that they would be sacrificing. We were excited, however, to host such an important event, especially since our Writing Center is still relatively new.

Everyone had a job, whether it was generating programs and flyers or just keeping Breslin sane when the final days were nearing their end. We approached the conference much like a collaborative writing assignment: we brainstormed, roughed out tasks and timelines, revised, grappled, hollered, and revised plans more until preparations were complete.

And, oh, those last few days, the scramble to tie up all the loose ends and finalize everything from the menu to the parking to the balloon order…Nothing could have been more rewarding than to watch the conference finally take place and to hear the positive responses from the attendees.

"I was extremely proud to be part of the Writing Center community. It was very helpful to see how other writing centers work, and I got some ideas on how to improve ours," said writing tutor Krysti Durcholz.

"The conference was everything we hoped it would be: challenging, inspiring, rewarding – and now over," Breslin said. "We have a shared hope with directors, writing tutors, and teachers across the region: that conferences like this one help each of us inspire more students to become better, more confident writers."

Article from *Volume 9, Number 2*

From St. Augustine Confessing to Dr. Dave Sinning: Teaching Nontraditional Texts in the Tutor Training Course

Mary Beth Simmons, Director of the Writing Center
Villanova University

On the first day of "Tutoring Writers: Theory and Practice," I ask my future tutors to take out a sheet of paper and make a list of 10 nouns or adjectives that they would use to describe themselves. I remind them to start with the basics. "Brother," "daughter," "student," and "friend" often appear on their lists, as do "energetic," "curious," "studious," and "kind." "These are all really good words," I tell my class. We continue to construct our collective list on the board until we have maybe 40 words staring at us. "What's missing?" I ask the class. I see puzzled looks all around. After a few moments, someone sees the lacuna and shouts, "Writer!"

"Yes! Yes!" I shout. "You all should have 'writer' on your lists!"

Of course I understand the undergraduate peer tutors' reluctance to claim "writer" as a title. "I've never been paid for my writing," they explain. "It seems so presumptuous to call myself that," they offer.

At the recent MAWCA conference at McDaniel College, I opened my session with this same prompt and was pleasantly surprised that my audience of 20 writing center folk left out "writer" in their lists. How can this be? We who work in writing centers would not call ourselves writers?!

I want my tutors-in-training to be thinking of themselves as writers from day one of the course. So while the writing center canon plays prominently in my syllabus with texts by Muriel Harris and Stephan North, I make sure I have us read Joan Didion's "Why I Write" early in the semester. All students of writing and writers would agree with Didion when she says, "I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and what it means. What I want and what I fear" (20). This process of discovery she speaks of is not only limited to the young writer; the process of discovery never ends.

In her essay, Didion also explains, in part, her life as an undergraduate. She tells us that her "attention was always on the periphery" (19). This line "speaks" to my tutors-in-training. Their lives are filled not just with the demands of coursework, but membership in multiple campus clubs and activities and possibly a job or two. In short, it makes for a fragmented life, and sometimes the periphery gets more attention than "what really matters." (Academics matter most, right?) Didion gives undergraduates the courage to pay attention to the periphery, to investigate that which intrigues and energizes them. And maybe they will even write about "the periphery" as she has.

A second "nontraditional" text I use in the tutor training course is a chapter from St. Augustine's Confessions. The chapter covers "the pear tree incident." In brief, when St. Augustine was a youth, he and his pals were bored one day, roaming around the neighborhood. They came across a pear tree, and while they were not hungry, they stole many pears, ate some, and then tossed the remaining pears to some pigs. Augustine remembered this incident long after it happened. St. Augustine tells his readers he "had no wish to enjoy the things I coveted by stealing, but only to enjoy the theft itself and the sin" (43). Why do we study St. Augustine in a tutor training course? My reasons are threefold: 1) Villanova is an Augustinian university and faculty members are encouraged to teach texts by the saint. 2) Confessions is simply a great book. Who wouldn't want to talk about a sinner turned saint? Don't we all enjoy entertaining the question of why it feels so good to be bad? 3) My tutors-in-training are all sophomores and juniors who have read St. Augustine; they have been talking about Augustinian themes since the day they arrived on campus, and they have written about Augustine.

Every spring semester when I teach Tutoring Writers, the "fear factor" arises early in the term. Tutors-in-training are nervous about the work that they will be doing in the center, and they are convinced they will only be tutoring in unfamiliar subjects. (The English major worries about lab reports and the Biology major worries about literary criticism.) Rereading and discussing St. Augustine's pear tree incident allows the class to stroll down memory lane, have a laugh about freshman year, and share remarks about grades and comments they received from professors about their writing. But most important, the tutors-in-training gain confidence in their roles as future tutors because they are treading familiar ground.

A third and final "nontraditional" text that I will talk about here is Sin Boldly! Dr. Dave's Guide to Writing the College Paper by David R. Williams. Put simply, this book gets tutors-in-training talking (and shouting, arguing, passionately throwing the book down on the desk, etc.). Once the future tutors have claimed the title "writer," once they have realized they will be conducting tutorials that cover familiar ground, they meet Dr. Dave. Dr. Dave practices what he preaches. He sins boldly. For example, in the chapter "Some Really Crude Basics," Dr. Dave says, "I always tell my sophomores at the beginning of my survey course to kiss their grandparents good-bye before the final, since so many of them seem to kick off that week. Even if there is a death in the family, you need to grit your teeth and get on with life. How long can a funeral take, anyhow?" (6). He's just warming up.

By page 110, readers have followed his rant on the ills of politically correct language and his impatience with writers wanting to be sensitive to their audiences. But readers have also picked up sound advice about avoiding clichés and providing sufficient evidence for support of an argument. When tutors-in-training are introduced to a sample student paper that Dr. Dave has included in his guide for writing a college paper, the mood in the center gets a little tense. Dr. Dave's student's paper is entitled "Women are Like Boxcars: A Study of the Cinderella Myth."

The day we discuss this essay, I ask my students to walk through it as if they are conducting a tutorial. "What positive remark would you provide this student about his work?" A future tutor will offer, "Well, it's a debatable thesis!" (The thesis is, "The reason why the story of Cinderella has become so popular and prolific is the across the board recognition of the fact that all women are awaiting their savior, who is a man, to deliver them from their boring little lives" Williams 110). Some students will praise his use of sources, while others will say that his sources are too scattered and not fully articulated in his paper. (One of his sources is an "incredible doctor of psychology" Williams 111).

It's always a clear gender split this day in the classroom: the women are angry and the men are giggling and whispering "this is so true" to one another. (The first year I taught Dr. Dave, I didn't let my students get a word in, because I was so busy punching the air with my index finger. "And another reason why this sample paper stinks…!")

But this paper serves a wonderful and important purpose in the tutor training course. This paper is a "safe zone" of sorts. Students are given the opportunity to talk about how they will handle an offensive paper in a tutorial. How does one give constructive criticism when one is so personally offended? The paper also allows the tutors-in-training to "bash the professor." Villanova University's Writing Center, does not allow tutees and tutors to engage in playful and spirited "bash the professor" talk. But Dr. Dave is an "unknown" to the course, and when students see he gave an A- to a paper riddled with surface errors and potentially offensive content, I allow them to "talk out the grade." It gives the students a voice; it builds confidence; and it helps them articulate the subtle distinctions in the range of grades.

Dr. Dave has become such a class favorite – love him or loathe him – that students email him with questions. He has proven to be extremely generous with his time and has granted interviews to two of my students. Their final projects on Dr. Dave's Sin Boldly! have been some of the stronger works in the class.

While students learn from and enjoy the traditional Writing Center canon, I have discovered that with the luxury of a semester-long tutor training course, I am able to be creative and playful with the syllabus. Those "nontraditional text days" have been some of the most beneficial, memorable and fun class sessions. I am forever tinkering with my syllabus; I invite you to contact me with any suggestions that have worked well in your own course. (marybeth.simmons@villanova.edu)

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Article from *Volume 9, Number 2*

How to Begin a Student-Produced Writing Center Newsletter

By Tiffany Yanosky, Peer Tutor
Penn State University

1. Determine the interest level of your targeted audience.
    - Are you writing for your writing center's tutors or for your entire campus?
    - Measure the possible success of a newsletter by sending a mass mail or email survey.
    - Ask tutors, tutees, and professors about their ideas. What types of articles do they want to read?
2. Determine the financial resources that your writing center can allot for a newsletter.
    - To defray the costs of having a newsletter, you can seek funds from closely related university departments such as the learning center or English department. You can also collect subscription fees from your subscribers. Realize, though, that breaking even or profiting is difficult.
    - Newsletters that are on the World Wide Web in PDF or HTML format can be less expensive.
    - Rely on writing center directors and tutors to submit articles and recruit volunteer interns to produce the newsletter.
3. Determine the time commitments of the faculty adviser and the student staff.
    - Depending on the frequency and length of the publication and the size and experience of your staff, the time spent on your newsletter's production can range from several hours each month for a faculty adviser to a couple hundred hours each semester for a student intern.
    - If the faculty adviser can arrange for students to receive internship credits for their work on the newsletter, students may use these credits as part of their credit load for the grading period.
4. Consider the advantages and disadvantages of print and online versions.
    - The printing and mailing of paper newsletters can cost several hundred dollars, but online newsletters usually are less expensive.
    - Online newsletters can also permit wider access to your articles, both current and past. Potentially millions of readers from around the world will be able to find your newsletter by using a search engine or by locating your link on another writing center's website. Also, you can create a list of subscribers to whom you send occasional emails that announce the publication of your latest issues.
    - One disadvantage of online newsletters is that their announcement emails can be easily deleted, whereas the front pages of print newsletters tend to catch readers' attention and are not usually discarded immediately. Most people prefer to read tangible paper newsletters, so if you must have an online newsletter, encourage your readers to print the articles and to distribute them freely so that your articles can be widely read.
    - Another disadvantage of online newsletters is the complex designing and building that their websites require. If you are inexperienced with new web technologies, be sure to consult tech experts or others who are more familiar with the technologies. You do not have to be a web expert to have an online newsletter!

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Looking Forward to Writing Back: A Tutor's Perspective on the Upcoming IWCA-NCPTW Conference

By Tara Warman, Writing Tutor
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Come for the fresh perspectives and the elbow rubbing. Stay for the roller coasters and the mouth-watering Hershey's chocolate.

The International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) and the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing (NCPTW) will be holding a joint conference this coming fall from October 23-25, 2003 in Hershey, Pennsylvania. The theme of this year's conference, "Writing Back," encourages tutors, directors, and teachers of writing to respond to the customary practices and beliefs in our writing centers. The submission date for proposals has passed, but registration for attendance will be accepted on the conference website (http://www.wc.iup.edu/2003conference/index.htm) until July 15.

Many of us are tired of hearing papers about the same scholarly topics conference after conference, and this year's presenters seem to be tired of giving them. The proposals that have been received so far promise to defy the expectations of those attending the conference and to give us all a new look not only at writing centers but also at how we can talk to one another about our work as tutors, directors and teachers. Some of the many proposals include:

- Writing Black: The Outcomes of Using Culturally Relevant Teaching with African American Adult Composition Students
- Outlaw Tutoring: Proofreading and Editing Revisited
- 3D Tutoring: Visual Rhetoric in the Writing Center
- A Calculus Tutor in the Writing Center (and Other Odd Bedfellows)
- Reaching Out with a Slapped Hand: The Politics of Writing Centers and Campus Literacy in the Margins
- The Joys of Tutoring: Finding Intellectual and Aesthetic Pleasure in Our Work
- Henry's Journey from Kenya: Intercultural Relationships in the Writing Center
- Tutor Anarchy: Redistributing Power in the Writing Center
- Three Virgins in Search of a Peer Tutoring Program
- Advice from a Caterpillar: Finding Potential in "Wrong" Writing

Fatal Attraction: The Love Triangle between Tutors, Students, and Faculty

Collaborating with two other tutors at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Writing Center, I am working on a presentation entitled "Lather, Rinse, Create: Revamping Creativity in Scholarly Writing." We are gathering syllabi from a variety of professors who teach liberal studies writing courses and comparing them in order to see how creativity might be implemented. Over the summer, we will create a syllabus of our own, featuring a number of creative assignments and discussing how they could be effective in a liberal studies course. (After asking one professor for a syllabus, I was given a mini-lecture about how offensive and inappropriate it is for students to suggest how professors ought to teach a course. I was not discouraged, however, because our ideas are not directed at anyone in particular and, after all, the theme of the conference is "writing back.") We are also going to talk about how we as writing center tutors can help to cultivate creativity in the writing of our peers, rather than forsaking creative elements in favor of grammatical conformity. With any luck, we can give the tutors, directors, and teachers who attend our session some fresh ideas to take back to their universities, and maybe they can use them to rejuvenate their own techniques.

As an experienced tutor with the biases of a veteran chocolate lover, I am really looking forward to this conference. We will be staying at the Hershey Lodge and Convention Center, which is located near the Hershey Theme Park and Chocolate World and features recreational treats such as a hiking trail, indoor pool, whirlpool, and sports bar. There are also many reasonably priced restaurants nearby, and the fall foliage ought to be at its height just as conference time approaches. This is a chance not only to attend an interesting and reputable national conference, but also to be away from the grind of university life for a few days and to enjoy everything the conference and Hershey have to offer.

If you would like to attend or want more information about the conference, please contact the conference chairperson, Ben Rafoth, at brafoth@iup.edu.

I hope to see you there!

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How I Got to Africa

By Twila Yates Papay, Professor of English and Writing
Rollins College

Four years ago, I spent some months in Africa, including a number of weeks working in the amazing Writing Center at the University of the Western Cape, outside Cape Town, South Africa. There I observed consultations in seven of the eleven official languages of the nation and strove to be of some use to the director, presenting requested workshops for peer consultants and lecturers, meeting independently with peer consultants who were developing studies for a book on one-on-one tutoring in writing, and chatting endlessly on our mutual interests in writing center evolution. Back home I spoke and wrote extensively about this experience, eventually boring my friends and running out of conferences.

Out of so much intense reflection, I came gradually to comprehend the importance of what I had seen: a writing center where deeply cherished comfort and carefully defined safe space made room for controversy. There students moved easily into confrontation, laughing over difference but probing it deeply all the same. Avoiding the rush to easy consensus, they struggled in their thinking and writing not so much for closure as for understanding. Their willingness to complicate their work and to reach for harder truths was surely a product of their political situation. But it offered a model we might emulate to move ourselves and our clients beyond the convenience of compromise.

Though I recently published an article exploring South African writing centers' practices of comfort and contact, it examined only a few threads of the experience. How I got to Africa, how peer writing consultants readied me for the journey – this is another story in search of explication.

Facing the enormity of my undertaking and the paucity of my preparation, I had turned to peer writing consultants. To prepare me for visiting a South African writing center, my six-student research group met weekly to consider complications unheard of in our Rollins Writing Center: multiple languages, a rich oral tradition, and education-hungry university students who had seen few textbooks during apartheid. Emailing peers in South Africa and researching multi-cultural, multi-linguistic, multi-tribal education, we considered learning strategies and techniques that I might study. Without the research community of the peer consultants, my sabbatical would have been smaller, less auspicious, and certainly less insightful.

One example of this collaborative preparation's impact on my thinking occurred to me only recently. Late in our research term, one student named Tim reported that he had been wondering about South African cultural traditions. Might the intense respect for the wisdom of elders cause university students to have difficulty challenging what was taught? Would that respect translate into a problem for peer consultants, who would be seen as authority figures no matter how they worked? After much deliberation, the group placed this issue on my top-five list of research questions.

In the end, the answer was obvious: given the general respect for teachers and the practices of South African education, peer consultants shaped their center into a dramatically different space for learning. Here, authority had been set aside through numerous carefully devised strategies (e.g., working with clients from their own classes, offering group sessions, hesitating over linguistic differences, and urging clients into confrontations with each other). But had Tim not raised this question, how long might it have taken me to seek out the answer that offered my most important discovery?

Of course, our research was complicated. Though the group spelled out a high-sounding goal ("figuring out how learning in a multi-cultural third world environment of apparent chaotic conflict is impacted by writing center practice"), the project changed as we worked. At one point Sacia wrote of the group's larger role: "It's not just that you're going to Africa. Everything we consultants have learned about writing and learning is going with you. What you say and do will be an amalgam of what we believe and understand."

Later the group came to realize that I could prepare little until I arrived. Wanting me to offer something in exchange for my own learning, we concluded that my task was not to speak but to listen. Thus, what we could not plan for redirected our research. Probably I was most useful at UWC because we gave up the ridiculous notion of carrying any knowledge to Africa. "The best thing you can take them," reflected Lexie, "is what you carry in your head – our stories, our combined discoveries, all the practices you know. You'll have to hear their stories, learn their needs, figure out what to offer on the spot."

Our focus shifted again when Katie bluntly pointed out that we had no idea what I might learn. What might we do with that learning once I came back? How might we understand those principles of writing centers that had emerged from situations of privilege? How could recognizing the position of privilege guide our obligations in a global community? Given this broader context, we began to wonder: could the learning of well-to-do students at privileged institutions be applied to broader learning situations? And more importantly, how might we change?

Well, I understand now that I found the answer to that question as well. Perhaps we believe we cannot change American foreign policy or the facts of a privileged nation, but surely we can learn to live with less . . . and more. Less reliance on the comfort zones that we will always cherish in our writing centers, more willingness to sacrifice consensus for comprehension. Less convenience, more complication. How I got to Africa was a matter of Rollins peer consultant collaboration. How I came back was the result of UWC peer consultant courage. Our centers must rely on both.

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www.writing_and_the_web.com
Coming to Terms with Technology in the Writing Center

Marie Lilly, Technology Tutor and Writing Tutor
McDaniel College

Computers and technology have become an increasingly important part of the writing process. In fact, most students and writers no longer write their papers in ink but instead compose and edit them on computers. Through these computers, writers now have access to the large amount of information that they can find on the Internet. The World Wide Web has become the world's primary tool of communication and the storehouse for information, and the Internet can provide background information on a topic, academic support for a thesis, or resources to assist in the writing process itself. The result of this growing connection between technology and writing must consequently affect the way writing is taught and tutored.

Everyday, writing tutors are forced to deal with technology, particularly when their writing centers are located in a computer lab. They must not only help students with the hard copies of their papers, but they must first show them how to print their papers. They must know how to fix a jammed printer, make a frozen computer work again, and offer a solution to the hysterical student whose paper is due in an hour and has been confronted by a dialogue box reading: FILE PERMISSION ERROR! FILE CANNOT BE RETRIEVED. Although tutors are expected to be able to deal with all these issues (while simultaneously working on actual papers), they are never trained in software, hardware, or the world of the Internet. In order to be efficient at their jobs, writing tutors must learn how to both deal with technology and use it to their advantage.

Often it seems that technology only creates problems within writing centers. However, it is important to recognize that this technology is not disappearing and cannot be ignored. Furthermore, technology offers great benefits for writing centers and students engaged in the writing process. At colleges all over the world, writing centers and classrooms are being "wired" for technology and the Internet. Writing centers now exist beyond the physical space of the center itself and have expanded into cyberspace. Now, a writer at McDaniel College can download a worksheet on comma usage from Purdue University. Writing center coordinators and writing tutors can view and talk to writing centers all over the world. The International Writing Center Association (IWCA) maintains a website (http://iwca.syr.edu) that compiles all of these online writing centers into a linked list. This list creates a space where users can learn from each other, writers can give and receive tips, and everyone can find answers to their questions. Some of these sites, particularly The Writing Lab at Purdue University (http://owl.english.purdue.edu/), are the best and most accessible writing resources available. The more that writing centers engage in this effort, the more useful these forums will become. Writing centers should not merely exist among technology but rather engage that technology to facilitate learning about the writing process.

Technology seems scary to most writers, tutors, and administrators. As an English major and writing tutor, I once believed it to be unapproachable. However, a class called Advanced Composition allowed me to come to terms with the technology that I already used everyday. I was increasingly doing the majority of my communication online, and when I learned the basic operating rules of this new world, I learned the potential that it promised. More importantly, I learned that this world was accessible to people of all disciplines and skill levels. Through designing my first website, I learned that the online world and the hardware that houses it are not encoded in a foreign language but rather in the language of writing. Designing a website is virtually writing a different kind of essay, and a good first step to learning your way around a computer is learning how to type in a word processing program. We use technology everyday, and everyday we use it to write. Understanding and maximizing the benefits of that technology needs to become another part of the writing and tutoring process.

For more information about this topic and writing on the web, check out the website that accompanies this article: http://www2.mcdaniel.edu/English/Marie/MAWCA/pages/writingcenters.htm

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Articles

Article from *Volume 9, Number 2*

Review of *The OWL Construction and Maintenance Guide* edited by James A. Inman and Clinton Gardner

Matt Hughes, Peer Tutor at Penn State University

When Julie Story, associate director of the Penn State University Undergraduate Writing Center, asked me last year if I was interested in helping her with our e-tutoring initiative, I immediately said yes. As an uber geek and peer tutor, I had fantastical visions of tutor and writer, collaborating over a work that is displayed simultaneously on both computer screens. Tutors would highlight sentences remotely using software that I would design. I imagined a gigantic, searchable database, clearly explaining every possible writing problem, all at the tutor's fingertips. Most importantly, I imagined all this would be easy.

"Why aren't people doing this already?!" I thought. Am I am currently steeped in our own OWL construction, I am starting to realize why: it is a lot of work! Few writing centers have enough resources–money, time, knowledge, and personnel–to even start a successful OWL, nonetheless create the utopian OWL of my visions. However, with the help of *The OWL Construction and Maintenance Guide*, edited by James A. Inman and Clinton Gardner, writing centers can learn to make the most of their current resources.

In the valuable CD-ROM, *The OWL Guide*, you'll find "a wide range of materials, from advice about writing grants to funding OWLs, to reports on how to develop OWLs for specific student populations, and to information about training tutors to work in OWL environments." The collection of "brief information contributions" and "more extended scholarly analyses of key OWL issues" are loosely segregated into three main sections: "Contemporary OWLs," "OWL Construction," and "OWL Maintenance. "

"Contemporary OWLs" gives a nice overview of the history and theory of OWLS, as well as many examples of current OWLS. Josephine A. Koster begins with a terrific "Virtual Tour" of sixteen OWLs, reviewing all OWL types: informational, interactive, and live (or synchronous). Next, Muriel Harris, director of the infamous Purdue OWL (http://owl.english.purdue .edu), retells the history of how Purdue's "fledgling e-mail service" became the pinnacle of OWLs everywhere, attracting over 15,000 visitors a day. Then Beth Hewett offers a substantial, scholarly analysis of the theories behind online learning, focusing on Bruffee's Social Constructivism learning paradigm. The rest of the "Contemporary OWLs" section reviews the role of five context-specific OWLs: psychology, community college, secondary school, Naval Academy, and graduate school.

The sizable "OWL Construction" section offers writing centers a rough blueprint on how to construct an OWL. Here you'll learn how to plan and fund an OWL, how to begin construction, and how to choose an e-tutoring option that is right for your program. Inman begins the section with his helpful "OWL Construction Checklist." Though short, Inman's checklist is a practical list of the steps most OWLs will have to take. I particularly like his marketing suggestion: "You might have the institution's president submit one of her or his speeches as the first OWL submission, for instance, and have the campus newspaper cover the process."

Every OWL, no matter how small, needs initial and maintenance funds. Barry Maid, Lisa Cahill, and Ben Rafoth offer two insightful articles that are sure to help any OWL coordinator increase the chances of winning a grant. In "Feeding an OWL," Maid and Cahill explain the expenses of OWLs and where to look to apply for grants, while Rafoth focuses on how to write grants in "Writing Grant Applications." Particularly useful is Rafoth's advice to "adopt the right perspective"; for example, in writing a grant proposal to the State System of Higher Education (SSHE), Rafoth emphasizes how a successful OWL could serve not only his institution but the SSHE as well.

Before coding an OWL, all writing centers should take a good look at Erin Karper's "Web Usability and OWL Design." Karper, technical coordinator of the Purdue OWL, emphasizes "the importance of consistency" and explains ways to make your site user-friendly. Karper also includes methods to maintain your site and offers an extremely generous list of references every OWL webmaster will want to keep firmly fastened to the monitor.

If you are looking for training materials, the two articles "More Talk, Less Fix" and "Tutors Made of Text" expose new e- tutors to the various forms of e-tutoring: synchronous and asynchronous. In "More Talk, Less Fix," Roberta Buck and David Shumway include a wonderful appendix filled with conference transcripts. After each sample essay, a sample response follows that demonstrates collaborative learning. For those of you already diving into the waters of synchronous tutoring, "Tutors Made of Text," by Eva Bednarowicz and her tutors, offers the perfect training materials. Bednarowicz includes a helpful chat transcript with her tutors about their e-tutoring concerns. Three insightful essays by the tutors follow the lighthearted chat.

The slimmest section, "OWL Maintenance," comes last. In addition to including essays on site maintenance, this section is also a repository for miscellaneous essays describing "in-service training" and "publishing about OWLs." Again, Inman begins the section with a "Maintenance Checklist." The practical "OWL Assessment Questionnaires" by Godden and Grigsby is a great template for those starting to build their own OWL forms. Once you have collected enough information about your users, you need to read Karen Austin's "Making Praxis the Axis: Researching Asynchronous Tutoring." Even if you use synchronous tutoring, Austin's essay is well worth the read. Her argument to the tutoring community is centered on "praxis," a theory that combines the traditionally two exclusive aspects of learning: practice and theory. Austin argues that theorists cannot wait until online learning theory is perfected before forming their OWLs; likewise, practicing OWLs must contribute back to online learning theory by contributing invaluable statistics about their OWL.

After I finished reading *The OWL Guide*, my first thought was that I wish I had read it before I began any work on Penn State's OWL. But then I was reminded of Austin's "praxis" argument, and I began to change my mind. Practice and theory cannot occur in isolation; they must occur simultaneously in the construction and maintenance of any OWL. For example, for this review, I read *The Guide* front-to-cover, but it is not meant to be read this way. Its real value lies as a dynamic reference for others struggling and succeeding with the issues that affect every OWL. If you stumble across an undiscovered issue with your own OWL, Inman and Gardner (and the rest of us!) encourage you to write about your experiences, and hopefully your work will help someone else.

In the introduction, Inman and Gardner predict they will publish an updated issue every two years. My only suggestion for that next issue is related not to content, but to form. An electronic resource like this should be more accessible and searchable. I was amazed when I could not find an index to this enormously large, "admittedly non-uniform" resource. Also, the navigation between the articles left much to be desired as one could only go "BACK" or "HOME" from any article.

Unfortunately, the CD-ROM form is cause for much of the blame. Why not keep the essays – which are in an Internet- friendly format already – on a website? Instead of buying a CD-ROM, users could buy a two-year subscription to the website. Storing *The OWL Guide* online would make it more dynamic as essays could be added with little overhead and could be more easily searched.

Despite a few problems with the medium, Inman and Gardner have put together a valuable resource for anyone thinking about OWLs and online tutoring. Whether you are a director starting to build your own OWL or a tutor who questions the validity and logistics of online tutoring, *The OWL Guide* has something for you.

(IWCA Press, 2002, $17 + $2 s/h)

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Articles

Article from *Volume 9, Number 2*

The Birth and the First Steps of our Writing Center at METU, Turkey

By Defne Akinci and Aylin Atakent, Coordinators of the Academic Writing Center
Middle East Technical University

Ever since the Academic Writing Center at Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara, Turkey started to operate in 2001, we have often wondered how our students used to cope with the demands and requirements of academic work -- especially those of writing -- in their departments. Not surprisingly, in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) context outside a native-English speaking environment like ours, students face new requirements as they move from one year to another. Being in an English-medium university presents our students with the need to deal with discipline-specific assignments, such as writing term papers or dissertations and giving presentations, with an additional challenge of doing these in a second language. As teachers of English of pre-sessional and EAP courses, we intend our writing center to address students' ongoing needs both in the use of English and in conducting academic study at METU. While our methodology and services are similar to those centers within English-speaking contexts, our very nature seems to bring unique aspects to writing center work. In this article, we would like to recount how our writing center came to existence and evolved to its present condition, and we will draw a picture of how we work in an ESL context.

The Beginnings of Our Writing Center

At present, we work fulltime as co-coordinators at the writing center. Since we both found ourselves involved in writing center work through different paths, we would like to present our backgrounds individually.

Aylin: I first came across the idea of a writing center in 1998 through a colleague, Nuray Grove, who had just done part of her PhD studies in the States. Upon her return to Turkey, she proposed that we set up a similar center at our institution. Because my academic interests revolved around second language writing, I became involved as well. The writing of the proposal and the initial preparations took longer than two years. In the meantime, I read a great deal of the writing center literature, and I observed a center in the States. Later, when my colleague who first proposed the establishment of our writing center announced that she was going back to the States to complete her degree, I was assigned as coordinator. Now, our center has two coordinators, one from each of the two English departments: the Department of Basic English and the Department of Modern Languages. In March 2001, our center was up and running with Gulsima Baykal and myself as co-coordinators, and part-time tutors in both departments. A year later, Gulsima changed sectors and went into the software business, and Defne joined me at the writing center.

Defne: I came across the idea of having a writing center to help writers within an educational setting at the time of its establishment at METU in the spring of the year 2001. When the announcement was made for volunteers to work as tutors in the center, a few of my enthusiastic colleagues at the Department of Basic English and I joined as part-time tutors. We received training and orientation sessions, which totaled about seven hours. We also observed each other's tutorials during the semester and held meetings to exchange and discuss our ideas and experiences. Most of the seemingly first-timers among us, including myself, happened to have already completed some form of study abroad and had already encountered the idea of getting help for writing either in the form of going to the writing center or joining the tutorial schemes for undergraduate and graduate students in universities. I completed my studies in the

University of Manchester, UK, and I made use of one of the tutorial schemes to receive feedback and guidance from a volunteering member of the faculty. Therefore, I was already aware of the nature of the work, albeit within a different system. When the previous coordinator, Gulsima, left, I was assigned to her position in Spring 2002 and have happily worked here full-time since.

The Education and Training of Our Tutors

As coordinators, our job covers administrative work, tutor training and promotion of the center in the university. We have an assistant who is helping us with paper work and tutorials and still has time for her MA studies. The number of tutors working with us per semester may range between 10 and 14. They are all experienced teachers of English as a Foreign Language, either in the Department of Basic English (English foundation course) or the Department of Modern Languages (EAP courses). Most of them hold either a BA or an MA in Foreign Language Teaching, and some also have language teaching certificates. While most of them are Turkish, we occasionally work with native English-speaking tutors as well.

The new tutors joining the center receive a daylong training at the beginning of each semester. Our training session introduces the idea of one-to-one tutoring as opposed to classroom teaching and focuses on the particularities of the system at the center. Within the first couple of weeks, new tutors observe the ongoing tutorials of the experienced tutors, and we discuss the issues that emerge from their observations. They also read materials related to writing centers and tutoring.

Though we offer help related to any kind of writing, we do not train our tutors to learn each genre of writing in English, the reason being lack of time and the small likelihood of encountering each type of writing in one semester. However, we have samples of a wide variety of types and genres of writing within the center, which both the tutors and the clients can use as references.

The same rationale goes for dealing with the discipline-specific needs of our clients. We do not select nor train our tutors to specialize in certain subjects. However, they have an excellent command of English, good interpersonal skills, much enthusiasm, and a high degree of self-esteem, which have proven to be sufficient to earn our center a good reputation within the university.

The Characteristics of Our Clients

For now, our services are limited to senior undergraduate students, graduate and research students, the reason being the potential difficulty of trying to cope with all 20,000 students at METU. The number of students who have used our services has changed dramatically from the first year of its operation to the second. The first year we had 120 students, while by the end of the second year, this number had reached 350. Some of these are our regular clients, working on a longitudinal research project and writing a variety of related papers. The rest may have used the services only once or twice for their immediate needs, such as writing a Statement of Purpose or a Curriculum Vita.

The majority of our present clients are native speakers of Turkish; however, we may have students of other nationalities as well. The language used during the tutorial, whether Turkish or English, depends on the client's preference. From our experience, we can say that the needs of the writers we work with can be categorized into two, based on their prior exposure to and use of English language. Those who have had a certain amount of experience with using English in an English-medium high school tend to have needs pertaining to organization, use of sources and referencing, and clear expression of thought in writing. Those who have little or no experience in using English in academic study tend to have additional needs, such as help in sentence structure, use of verb tenses, transitional words and connectors, and mechanics. In any case, we tend to focus on the "meaning" they want to convey in their papers, and we offer suggestions by using their verbal explanations as a yardstick.

The "Stages" of a Tutorial and Our Workshops

A tutorial at our center lasts 45 minutes. Most often, we let the clients tell us what to focus on during the session, and together we set the agenda to come to an understanding of how we will proceed. Then, either the client or the tutor reads the paper aloud. In the early days, we used to insist that the client read the paper aloud; however, we have seen that some clients are better at hearing their mistakes when we read their paper aloud with the right intonation. During the "instruction time" of the session, we pay attention to whether what they intended to say has actually been expressed in the paper, and whether another reader can easily understand this, or not. Only toward the end of the session will we mention any recurring grammar or vocabulary mistakes for them to take note of and correct themselves. We believe that this step is crucial for tutorials with ESL students. When the session is over, we list the accomplishments of the session together with the clients and encourage them to do further work on their paper.

While working on a paper with a client, we refrain from evaluating papers or judging clients' work. We steer clear from commenting on a possible grade that the paper may get. Alternatively, if the paper has already been graded, we do not make remarks about the instructor's grade or comments. If the clients insist on knowing why their paper received a particular grade, we will first suggest that they discuss this with their professor, and then we will try to explain the possible reasons.

Besides one-to-one tutorials in our center, we also organize classroom workshops, mostly addressing the needs of graduate students. The titles of some of the most popular workshops are "How to start and continue writing a thesis/dissertation," "Writing technical project reports," and "Preparing and delivering effective presentations." We have also held similar sessions for seniors and juniors upon request from their professors.

The Future of the METU Writing Center

Our two-year-old center is still at the growing stage and is gaining ground among various departments. For some, our center has already become an established institution for learning and consulting. Unlike some other teaching-learning contexts, we have been fortunate enough to receive immediate oral feedback from our clients, which, alone, have given us the courage and enthusiasm to keep going. Our aims for the future include a more extensive service that covers all undergraduate students, initiating an online writing center, and delivering outreach programs in other institutions. However ambitious these goals might sound for now, the road we have traveled thus far shows us that we can travel much further and to wider fields in the future.

To learn more about METU's Writing Center, please visit: http://www.awc.metu.edu.tr/

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Article from *Volume 9, Number 2*

Writing Centers, Literacy Education, and Rebecca Moore Howard

By Stefanie Klevze, Peer Tutor
Penn State University

This fall's IWCA-NCPTW 2003 Joint Conference in Hershey, PA (October 23-25) will feature Rebecca Moore Howard as the keynote speaker. Howard is finishing her fourth year as an associate professor of writing and rhetoric at Syracuse University and is also the chair of the Writing Program there. Known for her articles addressing public notions of literacy education, the title of Howard's speech is "The Consequences of Writing Back: Negotiating Cultural Premises with the National Media."

"My presentation is going to talk about the ways in which the daily work of tutors and teachers gets taken up in the public media," said Howard. "We think of tutoring as a highly individual enterprise, but it's part of the larger enterprise of literacy education. I'm going to talk about ways in which I think the work of writing centers and specifically the innovative work—the work that revises public notions of literacy education—needs to place itself deliberately in the limelight and needs to be able to explain itself to a public that cares very much about literacy education."

Howard graduated from West Virginia University, where she studied literature and focused on linguistics. She wrote her dissertation on teaching first-year writing to non-native speakers of English, and as a graduate student at West Virginia, she spent her first year of teaching in the writing center. After graduate school, her first job involved training and supervising tutors.

"I have an abiding interest in writing center work," said Howard. "I like the one-on-one and small-group work of writing centers very much, and I like the ethos that prevails in a writing center."

Along with her interest in writing centers, Howard has a passion for linguistics. She is most interested in how language operates in society, and this interest is what drew her into the field of composition and rhetoric.

"As an educator, my goals are to understand the ways in which language operates to preserve social hierarchy (the hierarchies of race, class, sexual orientation, gender, etc.) and to figure out ways in which language instruction can work to disrupt social hierarchy," said Howard.

Howard looks forward to sharing her ideas and goals with writers and tutors at the upcoming conference in Hershey.

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"Talking Back – Writing Black" With Aesha and Howard

By Tiffany Yanosky, Peer Tutor
Penn State University

Aesha Adams and Howard Rambsy II, graduate students in the English Department at Penn State University, will present the endnote speech at the IWCA-NCPTW 2003 Joint Conference on October 23-25 in Hershey, Pennsylvania.

The topic of their speech, "Talking Back – Writing Black: Employing African American Verbal Styles in Writing Centers," was derived from their personal and academic backgrounds in African American culture. According to Aesha, "This phrase [talking back] speaks to the ways in which young children in African American communities are often admonished not to challenge authority by 'talking back.' But I also thought about the ways in which African American orators and audiences often interact. For instance, in the Black church, preachers encourage their audiences to 'talk back' to them while they preach. In this way, both the speaker and the audience work together to create the text (the sermon). Howard and I are interested in exploring how centralizing African American verbal styles in writing centers, such as 'talking back,' might provide alternate ways of viewing texts and the tutor-tutee relationship in writing centers."

Howard adds that their speech's topic was partially the result of his classroom teaching. "To use African American verbal styles such as call and response, distinctive phrasings, and ways of knowing in presenting information in the classroom or in public settings allows me to draw on a body of knowledge that speaks to diverse audiences. Often the style becomes one of the mediums and the medium, as the saying goes, is the message. What I try to teach my students is that there are multiple ways of communicating their ideas." He adds, "To write in ways that are informed by African American ways of knowing and showing talks back to those Standard approaches that sometimes silence and inhibit."

According to Dr. Jon Olson, president-elect of the IWCA, member of the conference planning committee, and director of the Penn State Writing Center, Aesha and Howard were chosen as endnote speakers because, "The conference planning committee wanted to have something collaborative and something that was a little more student-oriented…Paula [Dr. Paula Gillespie, director of the Marquette Writing Center] mentioned Aesha, her former tutor, who came to Penn State. I thought of Howard because he does such creative intellectual stuff (displays in the library, public presentations, a newsletter)… So since I had just received his newsletter on jazz and literature [The Next Movements: A Free Jazz/Memory Work Special Issue (Spring 2002)] that had Aesha singing on it, that's what gave me the idea to suggest a collaboration of the two of them."

Aesha Adams, a Ph.D. student in the English Department at Penn State University, originates from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where she attended Marquette University and earned a degree in English Education. During her education at Marquette, she studied and tutored with Gillespie. "I was a peer tutor at Marquette for a year. One of the most valuable skills I developed as a writing tutor was the ability to instruct on a one-on-one basis. I have translated that skill to my teaching strategies for my own writing classroom. I work to establish a community of writers where the lines of distinction between teacher and student are redrawn." Her current research interests include women's and

African American rhetoric.

A native of Jackson, Tennessee, Howard Rambsy II attended Tougaloo College in Mississippi and graduated in 1999 with Bachelor of Arts degrees in English and history. Now a graduate fellow in the American and African American literature program at Penn State University, he is continuing his scholarly work on African American poetry and prose. He has produced writings and exhibits about Richard Wright, Lance Jeffers, the Black Arts Movement, and African American music and poetry.

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Article from *Volume 9, Number 2*

An Introduction to *Spilling the Bean*

By the Writing Center Staff at Coe College

Two years after our writing center began operation in 1986, the writing center director initiated a staff development program required for all new staff members. This four-term course sequence, Topics in Composition, required each staff member to participate in several research projects and to write 25-30 papers over the two-year period. The portfolios of writings, turned in at the end of each term, were then filed away – a disappearance that most staff members assumed would be permanent.

In the summer of 1998, writing consultant Heather Libby received a summer research grant for purposes of assembling an anthology of readings derived from several thousand pages of old Topics papers. The purpose of this anthology was to introduce the writing center's philosophy and practices to our new staff members. This 200-page anthology was eventually christened with the title *Spilling the Beans*, in honor of one consultant who eloquently described spilling the beans while brewing her first pot of writing center coffee.

Heather's anthology combined reproductions of entire papers with brief excerpts from longer texts. Although the selection process took many hours of reading and photocopying and retyping, her most difficult task was devising an organizational scheme for the texts. Eventually, she chose an arrangement primarily driven by the consultants' emotional responses to their work. For example, all of us as staff members had experienced moments of anxiety and self-doubt, often with the mistaken perception that we are the only people experiencing this sense of personal inadequacy. Other recurrent topics included recollections of memorable conferences and reflections by graduating seniors discussing how their ideas about consulting have changed since their first term as consultants.

In the summer of 2002, a second summer research grant supported another consultant, Rachael Riggs, in producing a new 250-page edition of *Spilling the Beans*. By the time that Rachael began working on this project, it was apparent that the anthology did not function as a traditional training manual. Instead of telling staff members how to do their work, the texts reveal how 160 writing consultants have perceived and analyzed their work and experiences. We want new staff members to acquire similar habits of reflection–and to have a chance to compare their experiences with what has been observed and recorded by their predecessors. If we genuinely believe that a writing center should nurture a "conversation of mankind" (to borrow from Kenneth Bruffee), then we think our staff development should be based on a never-ending poly-logue among peers. The anthology provides us with an imperfect but invaluable written record of previous conversations in our Burkean parlor.

In her introduction to the first edition, Heather spoke of the anthology as "a choir of voices: a collage of diverse elements connected by a medley of common themes." She noted that a collage requires readers to recognize the interconnections among the various segments. We trust that as both new and more experienced staff members read and reread passages from the anthology, they will create unforeseen relationships never imagined either by those writers or by the writing center's director.

To give a small taste of *Spilling the Beans*, what follows is a series of short quotes from the anthology's first chapter, representing the staff's various attempts over the years to complete the sentence, "The Writing Center is. . . ."

Breakfast in Rawlins, WY, and the waitress asked if we were a team, and I said we were writing consultants, or if she liked, writing tutors, and she thought I said wedding tutors. 'You all goin' to get married?' (Oh, for the eternal question of how to word what we do.) –Nialle Woods, 1997

The Writing Center: the Mecca of random conversations. –Laura Farmer, 1999

The Writing Center: A socially acceptable, a semi-hedonistic, chit-chatty forum for family, friends and lovers. –Kim Potts, 1990

The secret of the CWC Writing Miracle: we don't concentrate only on the words on the paper. –Claire Rasmussen, 1996

The writing center, from my view, is designed as a place where students can meet with other students to talk about a paper (and other topics) so they can improve the paper (ideally, their writing) Before A Professor Looks At It…It seems obvious to me that the distinction between what professors do versus what consultants do is quite clear. We do not judge papers; we do not grade papers; we do not "own" papers; we are not higher than the students. –Lin Prisbrey, 2001

The Writing Center atmosphere is relaxed, warm, friendly, encouraging, abstract, and random--a perfect blend of attributes for any college. –Cynthia Gravatt, 1992

The Writing Center consultants are students who are constantly learning, just like the people who come to the Center for help--that makes the difference. –Anne Reilly, 1990

For every student who leaves the comforting discord of the Writing Center with an increased comfort level with the language and a greater appreciation for her ideas, that's a blow against the institutionalized ideas that younger students can't write, against the notion that asking for help is bad, that stepping outside of the self to exchange ideas with another is "cheating" and not human communication. Every time someone leaves us with the idea--however vague or subconscious--that talking about ideas is good and that we are their peers and not their teachers--well, by God, that's a blow against the institution itself…a faint hope that someday the current oppressive hierarchies will be toppled in favor of a sort of intellectual communism, where everyone will be welcome to share their ideas, regardless of age or gender, and the academic "conversation" that so many institutions claim to have will truly be a conversation. Or, better still, a confersation: we speak, we listen, we revise our ideas, and we share again, the point not being to narrow all ideas down to one agreed-upon set of ideals, but to broaden intellectual horizons and to shatter narrow-mindedness. –Kate Callahan, 1999

I can't think of a better place to be lost than in the complexities of the Writing Center. It's also a great place to be found. –Lindsay Niedergeses, 2001

A copy of *Spilling the Beans* is available upon request by contacting Dr. Bob Marrs, Coe Writing Center, Coe College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52402 (e-mail address:rmarrs@coe.edu).

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